Understanding Creative Musical Agency Through Composition
in Secondary Instrumental Ensembles

by

Michael V. Vecchio

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Music Education)
in the University of Michigan
2022

Doctoral Committee:
Professor Colleen Conway, Chair
Professor Angela Calabrese-Barton
Professor Michael Hopkins
Associate Professor Carlos Rodriguez
Michael V. Vecchio

vecchiom@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5319-5364

© Michael V. Vecchio 2022
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentors, colleagues, friends, and family for making this study possible. First, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for the teacher participants and their students in allowing me to experience meaningful creative musical activities and uncover elements of creative musical agency through the process. I am also thankful for my former elementary and middle school band students and music educator colleagues for inspiring me to pursue this topic.

I am grateful for the deep expertise and varied perspectives of my committee. Special thanks to Dr. Angela Calabrese Barton for her invaluable insight into the nature of agency development. I very much appreciate the expertise provided by Dr. Michael Hopkins for keeping the lofty ideals of musical creativity grounded in practice. I am deeply indebted to Dr. Carlos Rodriguez for being the catalyst of my pursuit with music education research. This study would not have been possible without the unwavering mentorship and relentless support of my dissertation committee chair Dr. Colleen Conway. Her profound belief in my work throughout my doctoral studies helped to foster my identity as a music teacher educator.

I am thankful for my friends, both within the PhD cohort and beyond. Their support helped me to stay grounded and find balance during the rigors of the doctoral degree. I will be forever grateful for my family and their unyielding encouragement of my musical and educational pursuits. They have consistently supported my interest in studying music and have helped me to become the educator that I am today. Finally, I could not have achieved this milestone without the love and support of my wife, Kim Fleming. Despite the countless hours of
studying, paper edits, and coordinating dog walks for Scooter to help get his “zoomies” out, we somehow made it through. I love you, Kimmy.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... ii

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. ix

LIST OF APPENDICES ......................................................................................................... x

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. xi

**Chapter I - Introduction** .................................................................................................... 1

  - Rationale ......................................................................................................................... 5
  - Purpose ............................................................................................................................ 5
  - Orientation ...................................................................................................................... 5
    - Context of Large Instrumental Ensembles .................................................................... 6
    - Creative Musical Activities ......................................................................................... 8
  - Threads of Agency ......................................................................................................... 9
    - Critical Pedagogy ......................................................................................................... 9
    - Student-Centered Learning ....................................................................................... 11
    - Constructivism ........................................................................................................... 12
    - Definitions of Agency ............................................................................................... 13
    - Framework for Agency Development ...................................................................... 13
    - Musical Agency .......................................................................................................... 15
  - Creative Agency ............................................................................................................ 16
    - Previous Definitions ................................................................................................. 16
    - Framework of Creative Agency ............................................................................... 18
    - Current Definition of Creative Musical Agency ....................................................... 20
  - Definition of Terms ...................................................................................................... 22
  - Method .......................................................................................................................... 23
Chapter II – Review of Literature .................................................................................. 25

Creative Process Models .............................................................................................. 25
  Contexts for Creativity in Music Education ................................................................. 26
  Process Models of Creativity ...................................................................................... 26
  Process Models of Musical Creativity ......................................................................... 29

Composition Activities ................................................................................................. 31
  Literature Reviews ...................................................................................................... 31
  Empirical Studies – Secondary General Music ............................................................ 34
  Empirical Studies – Secondary Instrumental Music .................................................... 37

Democratic Practices in Instrumental Ensembles ......................................................... 41

Scholarship on Considerations for Creative Agency ...................................................... 42
  Assessment ................................................................................................................. 42
  Social Contexts .......................................................................................................... 47
  Empathy ...................................................................................................................... 48
  Dialogism .................................................................................................................... 50
  Creative Agency and Social Justice ............................................................................ 51
  Summary of Considerations ...................................................................................... 52

Creative Agency in Empirical Research ...................................................................... 53
  Creative Agency Within General Education ............................................................... 53
  Creative Agency Within Music Education .................................................................. 56

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 58

Chapter III – Methodology ........................................................................................... 59

Design ............................................................................................................................. 59

Selection of Participants ................................................................................................. 61

Description of Participants ........................................................................................... 63

Data Collection .............................................................................................................. 71
  Individual Teacher Participant Interviews .................................................................. 71
  Observation of Composition Activities (Video Recorded) .......................................... 72
  Student Participant Focus Group Interviews ................................................................ 73
  Artifacts ....................................................................................................................... 73

Timeline ......................................................................................................................... 73

Trustworthiness .............................................................................................................. 74

Data Analysis ................................................................................................................. 75
Organization of Findings and Discussion Chapters .......................................................... 78

Chapter IV – Teacher Action and the Pedagogy of Composition Activities .................80

Instructional Strategies .................................................................................................. 80
  Encouraging Collaborative Creation ......................................................................... 88
  Encouraging Student Participation ............................................................................ 90
  Approaching Composition as Transfer of Musical Understanding ........................... 92

Instructional Materials .................................................................................................. 93
  Focus on Harmony .................................................................................................... 100
  Role of Notation ...................................................................................................... 103

Assessing Composition Activities ................................................................................ 105
  Social Comparisons ................................................................................................. 109
  Scaffolded Experiences and Clear Structure ............................................................. 110
  Consensual Assessment of Creativity in Practice ...................................................... 111

Summary of Teacher Action and Pedagogy of Composition Activities .................... 113

Chapter V – Teacher Thought and the Pedagogy of Composition Activities ............ 115

Contexts and Definitions of Composition .................................................................. 115
  Webster’s (1990, 2002) “Creative Thinking in Music” ............................................. 120
  Fautley’s (2005) Model of Group Composing ........................................................... 121
  Improvisation as a Precursor to Composition ........................................................... 123

Goals of Composition Activities .................................................................................. 125
  Process Over Product ............................................................................................... 129
  Standards .................................................................................................................. 130
  Student-Led Experiences .......................................................................................... 131

Precursors to Composition Activities .......................................................................... 132
  Enabling Skills and Conditions ................................................................................ 137
  Competence ............................................................................................................. 140

Benefits and Challenges of Including Composition Activities in Secondary Instrumental Music Curricula ................................................................. 142

Summary of Teacher Thought and Pedagogy of Composition Activities .................. 148

Chapter VI – Power ....................................................................................................... 150

The Role of Band ......................................................................................................... 150
Suggestions for Future Research .......................................................... 233

Suggestions for Teaching Practice .......................................................... 236

Final Thoughts .......................................................................................... 237

APPENDICES .............................................................................................. 239

REFERENCES .............................................................................................. 249
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  The relationship between student agency, identity, and figured worlds (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 193) ......................................................................................................................14

Figure 2  Systems Model of Creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 315) .................................28

Figure 3  Location of Composing Elements (Fautley, 2005, p. 44) ...........................................30

Figure 4  A Model of Pedagogy and Possibility Thinking (Cremin et al., 2006) ......................53

Figure 5  Songcrafting Process (Muhonen, 2016, p. 265) ........................................................56

Figure 6  Composition Process of Blackshaw (2020, p.73) .......................................................102

Figure 7  Model of Creative Musical Agency Development Within Composition Activities in Instrumental Music Contexts .................................................................211
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A  Sample Interview Protocol—Instrumental Music Teacher  ..................239
Appendix B  Observation Protocol .................................................................241
Appendix C  Sample Interview Protocol—Instrumental Music Students (Focus Group) ....242
Appendix D  Analysis Protocol for Artifacts ......................................................243
Appendix E  Sample Coding Document ............................................................244
Appendix F  Sample Worksheet from Skylerville Academy Eighth Grade Band .............246
Appendix G  Sample Worksheet from Skylerville Academy Seventh Grade Band ............247
ABSTRACT

Creative musical activities typically include improvising and composing (Running, 2008) as well as arranging (Piazza & Talbot, 2020). Composition activities have been examined within secondary instrumental ensembles (Hopkins, 2015). The notion of creative agency has been examined philosophically (Kanellopoulos, 2015; Katz-Buonincontro, 2018) and empirically (Muhonen, 2016). However, few, if any, studies have explored creative agency within instrumental music contexts. The purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings. Research questions included (1) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the instruction of composition activities to foster creative musical agency? (2) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the social considerations of composition activities in fostering creative musical agency? (3) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the negotiation of power in relation to composition activities to foster creative musical agency?

Through a multicase study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), three sites were selected that included secondary instrumental music programs participating in composition activities during the spring 2022 semester. Participants included three secondary instrumental music teachers as well as three to five of their students within each instrumental ensemble. The “cases” were bound by the specific instrumental music program at each site. Data included multiple individual interviews with teacher participants, focus group interviews with student participants at each site, observations of rehearsals and lessons, artifacts (including video recordings of
observations, video recordings of final performances of compositional products, and any instructional materials including books or worksheets), and field notes. Data analysis began following data collection at each site. All interviews with teacher and student participants were transcribed and coded, and codes were collapsed into themes. The themes that emerged included the pedagogy of composition activities, the role of power, and individual as well as social aspects of agency development.

Findings revealed similarities among teacher participants in how they approached composition activities, including the use of improvisation as a precursor to composition (Thornton, 2013). Teacher participants also shared the intended goal of deeper musical understanding as a result of the composition activity. Each teacher participant approached the role of power differently, from being held primarily by the teacher, to being shared between teacher and students, to being fully transferred to students during the composition activities. The ways in which students flexed against the parameters and the social considerations of classroom environment and collaboration were considered in relation to creative musical agency. A framework for creative musical agency is offered, based on the framework developed by Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) involving the assertion of identity within figured worlds. Implications for teaching practice and recommendations for future research are presented.
Chapter I
Introduction

When I began teaching middle school band, my main goal was to push my students to achieve the highest level of technical proficiency by the concert performance. This meant preparing works for festival that would showcase the best sections of the ensemble to receive high marks from the adjudicators. The programs who regularly scored highly at festival worked from this model, and the directors of these bands often had considerable control over their students’ focus and their motivation to “succeed.” This power and control over the process of preparing music was typically achieved through the fear of failure and carrying on the successes of bands from years past.

During my first year of preparing students for the festival performance, I ascribed to this model of “director with absolute power.” Rehearsals were cold, and I demanded that the students met my expectation of musical accuracy and expression. While my students rose to the challenge and met nearly all of my expectations, I began to notice they were only concerned with not “messing up” and did not demonstrate enjoyment or a deeper connection with the music we were performing. The performances were very important to me and my measure of their success, but the students seemed to approach performances as a “check-the-box” to complete a not-so-meaningful activity.

The following year I implemented a collaborative composition activity in the spring. This activity was designed for students to create their own musical ideas and collaborate with peers
to develop melodies using multiple students’ musical ideas. This process was introduced during the warm-up process of “I play – you play” (someone plays a short melodic fragment and the rest repeat it verbatim on their instruments). The parameters for this warm-up activity included a given key, time signature, and style of music. Next, the “I play – you play” method was transformed into the “question and answer musical conversation” method of improvisation where students start on the tonic pitch and end somewhere else for the question, and start on the 5th scale degree and end back on the tonic pitch by the end of the answer. Then, the students collaborated in small groups to piece together their own “musical conversations” creating a melody. Finally, we decided as a whole group where each section’s melodies would fit and how the final composition was going to be structured.

I noticed that students were very apprehensive when it came time for them to share their personal musical creations. To help alleviate this apprehension, I redirected the focus of the activity away from rigid accuracy and toward playful curiosity with seemingly infinite solutions within the musical parameters. I realized the classroom environment played an important role in allowing students the permission to fully realize their creative potential. The students were enjoying themselves most when they were able to flex against the parameters of the activity and utilize their musical skills to create novel musical ideas.

The amount of planning and preparation for this project was immense, but I needed to try something to have the students experience the musical elements on a deeper level than simply regurgitating what was on the page within their own part. I struggled to find an appropriate level of detail with the directions that I provided the students. The students had limited knowledge of music theory and limited ability to accurately transcribe musical ideas with musical notation. I decided to focus on their ability to play their musical ideas on their instruments, and to use notation as a tool to remind students of these ideas. Some students used
their own version of graphic notation with quasi-accurate rhythms and note names, while others were able to accurately write their musical creations with traditional musical notation.

My role in this activity varied depending on the day. At first, I was leading students through the process of “I play – you play” and “question and answer” by demonstrating on my euphonium, and acting as a cheerleader for all student volunteers who shared their creative ideas with the class. As students began to work in small groups, I became the “guide on the side,” jumping in to offer feedback only when absolutely necessary. By the last stages of finalizing the composition, I was simply facilitating discussion between students about what melodies should come in what order, and what the final formal structure of the work should be. The role of feedback throughout this collaborative composition activity played an important part in the direction of the students’ creations and their apparent motivation to continue to revise their work.

The result was overwhelmingly positive. Students were eager to try out new ideas within our warm-up routines in each rehearsal, they were detailed in creating their own “musical conversation” for homework, and they collaborated on the creation of melodies that were more technically demanding than what we were currently playing in our repertoire. We were on a tight timeline to have the final composition ready to perform for the spring concert, but the students rose to the challenge and demonstrated genuine excitement in sharing their own creation with their peers, parents, and teachers. The day of the concert I thought to myself, “This is what has been missing” – A chance for my students to play around with the musical elements of melody, harmony, form, and style to create their own musical work, resulting in a deep level of ownership. By transferring power from the director to each of the ensemble musicians through the composition process, my students were developing their creative musical agency.
The vignette above describes my own experience realizing the importance of including creative musical activities to foster creative musical agency among my students. My desire to refine the final product through controlling the process inhibited my students’ creative musical agency. This control, the exertion of power over the ensemble, resulted in the students having very little desire to contribute to the process beyond what I demanded. Through surrendering much of my power during the composition process, the students assumed greater roles in the process and were significantly more motivated to tackle the musical challenges before them. In subsequent semesters, I continued these approaches in a variety of settings within both concert and jazz ensembles. The results of these experiences were an increase in student motivation to engage in the rehearsal process and a level of ownership over the musical material that had not existed prior. While these experiences represent anecdotal evidence of the importance of developing creative musical agency within P-12 instrumental music students, there is considerable research in the realm of agency development and creative musical activities that support this notion. My experiences negotiating the role of agency through creative musical activities with my own students have served as the foundation for this study and are referenced throughout this chapter.

In this chapter, I will present the rationale, purpose statement and research questions that frame this study. Next, I will provide an orientation of the role of agency within creative musical activities, including the context of large instrumental ensembles and research pertaining to creative musical activities. Following, the threads of agency will be presented, followed by previous scholarship and a current definition of creative musical agency within instrumental music education. Finally, I will provide definition of terms utilized in this study, as well as an overview of the method employed.
Rationale

This chapter will make the case that there is a need for more empirical research merging the contexts of creative musical activities and agency development specifically within large instrumental ensembles. There exists considerable empirical research on creative musical activities within instrumental music education, including collaborative composition (Hopkins, 2015) and individual composition (Randles, 2010). There has also been a number of scholars positing theories of agency development philosophically (Bourdieu, 1977) and empirically (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010). Few scholars have explored the intersection of creative musical activities and the nature of agency development, namely Kanellopoulos (2015) philosophically and Muhonen (2016) empirically. However, few studies have explored the role of agency during creative musical activities within the specific context of instrumental music education.

Purpose

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings. Research questions included (1) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the instruction of composition activities to foster creative musical agency? (2) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the social considerations of composition activities in fostering creative musical agency? (3) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the negotiation of power in relation to composition activities to foster creative musical agency?

Orientation

This study framed creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental ensembles. In order to provide an orientation for the nature of agency and creative musical activities within large ensembles, threads of philosophical scholarship
regarding the role of large instrumental ensembles will be presented. Following, relevant literature regarding creative musical activities within large ensembles will be considered.

**Context of Large Instrumental Ensembles**

Over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of scholarship on the role of the large ensemble, specifically relating to power structures, democratic actions within ensembles, and the relevance of the large ensemble structure within students’ musical and social lives. Following Kratus’s (2007) call for music education to change with the times, Allsup and Benedict (2008) focused on the inherent power structures present within traditional large ensembles, including the historical track record of large ensembles being a bastion of a military ethos, an assembly line of efficiency, and a dangerous cyclical paradigm of having preservice music teachers mimic the way they have been taught in “successful” large ensemble programs that uphold these historic systems. Williams (2011) furthered this point by describing large ensembles in schools as archaic, and advocating for the replacement of large ensembles with other musical offerings that hold more relevance in students’ lives.

Conversely, authors have defended the large ensemble structure and refuted calls for curricular reform (Fonder, 2014). Allsup (2012) offered a potential solution to the “problem” of the large ensemble (specifically band) through Dewey’s (1909) Moral Principles of Education by claiming band has the capacity to bring together “art, community, self-interest, and public schooling” (p. 181). Miksza (2013) pointed out the “flimsy logic” of the calls for the end to the large ensemble, instead focusing on the importance of the individual goals and philosophies of large ensemble directors, the capacity for large ensembles to educate and grow the minds of students instead of playing what they already know, and the fact that “No one will benefit from throwing the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to curricular reform” (p. 49).
In 2014, Ithaca College hosted an instrumental music education conference which brought together directors of large ensembles at institutions of higher education and music teacher educators to discuss the value, meaning, and future of large ensembles within music education (Tobias, 2014). More recently, scholarship has included interrogations of large ensemble structures through lenses of equity and access (Freer & Tan, 2018), paradigm reform (Campbell, Myers, & Sarath, 2016), motivation (Rolandson, 2020), and curricular reform (Giotta et al., 2021; Kladder, 2020).

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing number of musicians and educators who support the notion of a shifting paradigm within music education regarding creative musical activities. In their report, the Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major (TFUMM) recommended reframing the role of the undergraduate music major from that of “Interpretive Performer” to one of “Improviser-Composer-Performer” (Campbell, Myers, & Sarath, 2016). This shift places a significant emphasis on the creative musical abilities related to improvisation and composition.

TFUMM takes the position that creativity (defined for purposes of this report as rooted in the ability to improvise and compose) provides a stronger basis for educating musicians than does interpretation (the prevailing model of training performers in the interpretation of existing works). (Campbell, Myers & Sarath, 2016, p. iii)

These philosophical threads speak to the importance of addressing power and agency within instrumental large ensembles. Similar to my own experiences of craving power and control over the rehearsal process, there are sociohistorical traditions of large instrumental ensembles that have undergone transformation and reckoning in recent years. The renegotiation of power within large ensembles, dispersed from the sole director to the multiple musicians within the ensemble, has been examined through empirical research, including Allsup’s (2002) dissertation on the role
of democracy in band, a review of which will be presented in Chapter II. One such avenue for this renegotiation of power is the inclusion of creative musical activities within large ensembles. In the following section, I will present an overview of relevant literature regarding creative musical activities within large ensembles.

**Creative Musical Activities**

Creative musical activities typically include improvising and composing (Running, 2008) as well as arranging (Piazza & Talbot, 2020). These activities are valued within P-12 music education, as evidenced by the inclusion of creativity as an anchor standard for the National Core Music Standards (NCCAS, 2016) as well as the proliferation of resources for teaching improvisation (Grasso, Parker, Graham & Riley, 2019; Stringham & Bernhard, 2019) and composition (Kaschub & Smith, 2013; Viig, 2015). Music educators report having strong support of including composing as part of their curricula (Hopkins, 2013; Schopp, 2006; Strand, 2006; Vecchio & Hopkins, 2021). Randles (2010) found individual composition activities with high school instrumentalists had a strong positive impact on the musical identity of students.

However, there are many perceived obstacles that in-service music educators report as preventing them from leading creative musical activities, including a lack of instructional time and technology (Fairfield, 2010; Strand, 2006), inadequate prerequisite creative experiences (Madura, 2007), the difficulty of learning improvisation (Forsythe, Kinney & Braun, 2007), and the limits of jazz being the typical route for creative instruction (Bernhard, 2013). Hopkins (2013) surveyed a national sample of orchestra teachers in the United States and found that less than half of the respondents include composing activities at least once per school year. In a replication of Hopkins’s 2013 study, Vecchio and Hopkins (2021) found similar results among secondary band teachers in the state of Michigan.
The literature concerning the inclusion of creative musical activities in large ensembles reflects the tension within the context of the large ensemble itself. Enacting the redistribution power and control over the musical learning processes can be a frightening task, as I can anecdotally report from my previous experience of introducing a composition project with my middle school instrumental students. Placing full faith in the students to create a musical work to be performed on an upcoming concert is truly venturing into the unknown. However, the result of expanding the musical possibilities through participating in a creative musical activity is, I believe, essential.

The renegotiation of power in the educational space has clear implications for the development of agency (i.e., Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010). In the following section, I will present literature concerning various threads of agency. These threads consist of the nature of power within critical pedagogy, student-centered learning, constructivism, and specific definitions and frameworks of agency development.

**Threads of Agency**

The term “agency” is central to this study as it pertains to the ownership over the learning process. Agency includes the notion of individual autonomy as well as an environment that allows this autonomy to occur. This section will first explore the environmental elements that can promote agency development, including critical pedagogy, student-centered learning, and constructivism. Following, specific definitions of agency will be presented, including a framework for agency development by Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010).

**Critical Pedagogy**

Paulo Freire’s (1970) seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* presented the notion of critical pedagogy where students are encouraged to question domination, oppression, and oppressive structures concerning classism, racism, and sexism. While earlier authors had
explored the importance of democracy in education (Dewey, 1923), Freire’s (1970) work focused specifically on inherent power structures within education and has influenced many educational theories since (Shor, 1992).

Freire discussed the dichotomy between the traditional “banking” concept of education and the progressive “problem-posing” concept. In the “banking” concept, the teacher is perceived as the one who holds all knowledge while the students are treated as empty vessels which are to be filled with deposits of knowledge from the teacher.

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (Freire, 1970, p. 72)

When viewed through the lens of power structures, this method of instruction creates a clear delineation between those whose ideas and experiences are valued and those that are not, placing the power for creative freedom solely with the teacher and not with the students. Freire went on to say, “The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed” (Freire, 1970, p. 73).

A more progressive approach, the “problem-posing” concept of education involves “posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). This view takes into account the relationship between the learner and the environment, grounding the educational content in lived experience and the reality of multiple perspectives. “Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education
involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 81).

Freire also discussed the importance of dialogue within educational power structures. As the opposite of one-directional deposits of knowledge from teacher to student, true dialogue between teachers and students allows the voices, perspectives, and realities of students to guide the learning process. “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1970, p. 80). This act of dialogue can break down barriers within educational power structures, be used as a tool of liberation, and a practice of freedom.

**Student-Centered Learning**

The work of Freire (1970) and his notion of inherent power structures within education help to frame the notion of student-centered learning. In defining the term within music education, Brown (2008) stated, “student-centered instruction is when the planning, teaching, and assessment revolve around the needs and abilities of the students” (p. 30). From this view, students play an integral role throughout the educational process and are connected to each step. Similarly, Blair (2009) described student-centered learning “where students are engaged in collaborative hands-on activities and where problem solving is a valued tool in curriculum” (p. 42). Here, the students are planted firmly in the center of every classroom activity. The teacher, who serves as “coordinator and designer of musical experiences” (Blair, 2009, p. 44), poses problems for students to explore and seeks feedback from students regarding teaching techniques utilized in the classroom. The role of assessment is shared between teacher and student.
**Constructivism**

A term that is often closely related to student-centered learning is constructivism, the idea that students create or construct knowledge and meaning through experiences with content. Dewey (1933) viewed constructivism as “a constructive, although unconscious, playing with meanings in their relations” (p. 183). In the following decades, educational psychologists would describe theories relating to constructivism, including the theory of discovery learning (Bruner, 1961), the development of knowledge structures (schema) as lenses when interacting with the world (Piaget, 1971), and collaborating with others to construct knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Fosnot (1996) provided the following formal definition of constructivism in learning: “A constructivist view of learning suggests an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns, raise their own questions, and construct their own models, concepts, and strategies” (p. ix).

Concerning constructivism within music education, Scott (2011) stated that “learning is viewed as an active process in which students become questioners and problem solvers, applying what they have learned through teacher-directed instruction in their ongoing work as musicians” (p. 193). Shively (2015) asked “whether music educators can approach the ensemble experience from a constructivist stance. … Doing so would likely lead to an environment in which students are more engaged in musical thinking and decision-making processes, rather than relying on the conductor” (p. 133). Wiggins (2016) stated that “the teacher is also a learner—learning about and from the learners’ perspectives, learning from what they know about music, and learning what they need to support their learning” (p. 67).
Definitions of Agency

Drawing the threads of student-centered learning and constructivism together, the term “agency” has a variety of definitions, from “the control individuals have of their actions and lives” (Jónsdóttir, 2017, p. 128) to “the property of individuals acting within a social and cultural world” (Awad & Wagoner, 2015, p. 229). Generally regarded as the intersection of ability and autonomy, agency involves volitional acts. In educational contexts, the individual learner must possess a sense of personal agency over their thoughts and actions. “They [individual learners] must believe they are capable of learning and must feel an element of control over their own situation. They must believe their ideas will be valued” (Wiggins, 2015, p. 22). Along with learner agency, teachers must be aware of what learners bring to educational contexts, including their past experiences and current circumstances that may impact their construction of knowledge. This sharing of responsibility between teachers and learners is believed to enhance the learning process. “The higher the level of mutual understanding among the parties involved, the more effective the learning/teaching situation will be” (Wiggins, 2015, p. 22).

Framework for Agency Development

In their work with students in the context of science education, and framed by the work of Bourdieu (1977) and Ahearn (2001), Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) developed a framework for agency formation involving identity and figured worlds. Bourdieu (1977) developed the structure-agency dialectic notion of agency, involving the affordances and constraints of the social structures on one’s ability to act, which moved the notion of agency from the individual to the social realm. Ahearn (2001) problematized Bourdieu’s structure-agency dialectic and advocated for a focus on the transformative nature of agency, citing the importance of including notions of prestige, position, and power within an individual’s ability to act and the meanings ascribed socially and personally from those actions.
In their framework for agency development, Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) posited that agency development is the intersection of one’s identity and one’s ability to enact their identity within a figured world (see Figure 1). Holland, Skinner, William, and Cain (2001) defined figured worlds as “socially and culturally constructed realm[s] of interpretation in which a particular set of characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 2001, p. 52). These figured worlds offer individuals a way to understand and act on their own identities, as well as how the context of the activity shapes their actions. Within the context of instrumental music, a figured world could encompass the process of rehearsing and performing a prewritten musical work in a full band setting, the process of an individual instrumentalist practicing and performing a solo instrumental work, or a creative musical activity in a small group setting of instrumentalists. In each example, there exists a social (and potentially cultural) realm, characters are recognized, significance is assigned, and specific outcomes are valued (Holland et al., 2001). Concerning the role of identity and agency, Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) state, “Who one is and has the opportunity to become as made possible or not through access, role playing, and expression fundamentally shapes the process of learning” (p. 194). Concurrently, figured worlds can constrain an individual’s ability to act with and through their developed or new identities. “Agency is at once the possibility of imagining and asserting a new self in a figured world at the same time as it is about using one’s identity to imagine a new and different world” (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 192).

**Figure 1**

*The Relationship Between Student Agency, Identity, and Figured Worlds (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 193).*
This framework offers a lens to consider how the roles of identity and figured worlds can interact in the development of agency. Within music education, Powell (2017) utilized the notion of figured worlds while compiling a narrative of the process of “becoming” a music teacher over a two-year period. While the narrative design will not be employed for this study, notions of identity and figured worlds will be considered in relation to creative musical agency. In the following section, I will present literature in the realm of musical agency.

**Musical Agency**

Literature regarding musical agency typically concerns musical knowledge and skill development in order to foster musical independence. “Music learning should empower learners with musical understanding so that they can become musically proficient and eventually musically independent of their teachers” (Wiggins, 2015, p. 39). Muhonen (2016) took the notion further by stating that musical agency is “an individual’s perceived capacity for action in relation to music or in a music-related setting” (p. 266). Muhonen’s (2016) definition of musical agency pertains to the individual learner asserting their will and directly influencing the musical structures and processes.
While these definitions recognize the unique nature and importance of musical knowledge and skill development, they fall short in drawing connections between these musical competencies and the potential social transformations that are possible within music. Borrowing from Calabrese Barton and Tan’s (2010) notion of agency, to flex against the traditional power structures within a large ensemble context through exercising musical knowledge in an autonomous way is “to develop their identities, to advance their positions in the world, and/or to alter the world toward what they envision as being more just” (p. 195). The following section will explore the term “creative agency,” including previous definitions of the term and an overview of the current definition within the context of this study.

**Creative Agency**

When exploring the term creative agency, there are a number of contexts and definitions to consider. In this section, I will present definitions of the term creative agency outside and within music education. I will also present an overview of a framework of creative agency that will be utilized through this study.

**Previous Definitions**

The term “creative agency” has been defined from various perspectives, including general education, arts education, and music education. Within general education literature, Hempel-Jørgensen (2015) examined the intersection of learner agency, creative pedagogy—namely, possibility thinking (Craft, 2000)—and socially just pedagogies. Regarding the importance of learner agency, Hempel-Jørgensen (2015) drew connections to meaning-making, developing competence, and constructing knowledge: “Taking part in knowledge-construction and gaining competence, through entering a zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978), requires learners’ volition as part of a learning community” (p. 534). The development of learner agency through creative pedagogies may also take place within a social context, where
agency is both individual and shared among the group. “On the one hand, entering a ZPD requires the learner to have the will and intrinsic motivation to develop and learn, and on the other, it requires the agency of the teacher or peer” (Hempel-Jorgensen, 2015, p. 535). Drawing on past literature (e.g., Hayes et al., 2009), Hempel-Jorgensen put forth the notion that focusing on creative pedagogies can strengthen socially just pedagogies through the enhancement of learner agency.

From an art education perspective, Katz-Buonincontro (2018) defined creative agency as “the combination of ‘creativity’ with the concept of ‘agency,’ or the capacity to realize potential” (p. 34) and claimed that it “provides a way of examining the extent to which creativity is promoted or constrained at the individual student level as well as at the classroom and school levels” (pp. 34-35). She considered the role that creative agency can play in allowing students to realize their creative potential within the arts and how creativity can be viewed as a human right. The notion of realizing creative potential is a crucial component within music education.

Within music education, Muhonen (2016) defined creative agency as an intersection of agency and generative practices of musical creativity. Drawing on the work of Barnes (2000) and Bruner (1996), Muhonen defined agency as “a person’s meaningful and intentional behavior” (p. 266) with a combination of individual volition and a reliance on individual skills. Creative agency, according to Muhonen (2016), is “any activity that brings something musically new to the musical process” (p. 266). Muhonen specifically examined the act of collaborative creative agency through songcrafting, stating “collaborative creation … [is] an agentive form of participation wherein musical creative agency is desirable for the participants” (p. 267). While Muhonen’s definition is specifically in the context of music education, it is also the most practical and showcases the unique opportunities that music education can offer both in terms of creative musical activities and in developing musical agency.
These definitions demonstrate the various ways to examine the intersection of creativity and agency. Hempel-Jorgensen (2015) offered a perspective from general education literature that involves knowledge construction and learner agency in both individual and social contexts. Within art education, Katz-Buonincontro (2018) viewed students’ creative agency as the realization of creative potential within the arts and how educators can view creativity as a human right. Muhonen (2016) posited a definition of creative agency within music education less reliant upon critical theories. She instead focused on the intersection of individual musical skill development and volition, with social dimensions of agency through collaboration also at play.

**Framework of Creative Agency**

In offering a broad philosophical framework for creative agency within music education, Kanellopoulos (2015) noted the renewed focus on creativity in education writ large serves the entrepreneurial, work-related values ascribed to the development of creative thinking (e.g., divergent thinking) for preparing the future workforce. Decades ago, Payne (1976) posited “the development of a divergent attitude of mind through creative activity is likely to act more effectively as a corrective to a basically convergent society” (p. vii), similar to modernist educational ideals of progressivism, authenticity, and individual freedom (e.g., autonomy). However, these ideals, according to Kanellopoulos (2015), have been co-opted and recontextualized into neoliberal conceptions of human beings as flexible individuals and “competitive entrepreneurs who are always in a position to invest in creativity so as to experiment with unpredictable situations, creatively exploiting uncertainty in profitable nonlinear ways” (p. 319). This neoliberal lens of creativity acts to undermine the modernist ideals of individual freedom and authenticity.

It does so by way of introducing an imperceptible shift of the notion of inclusion, from a notion that relates to welcoming difference as a means for cultivating personal freedom
and democratic participation, to a notion that designates readiness to be considered as a legitimate “player” in the ruthless competitive struggle for “creative work.”

(Kanellopoulos, 2015, p. 319)

This frame stands in contrast to the notions of creative agency where individuals are allowed the freedom to create through non-competitive, authentically meaningful musical activities that promote autonomous behavior. Offering a solution to this trend, Kanellopoulos (2015) stated that music educators should focus on four key elements of ownership, authority, inclusion, and difference in their teaching.

The first element of ownership included the formation of creative spaces and the ownership over specific creative ideas. Kanellopoulos posited that creative ideas are changed as they travel between minds through time. Kanellopoulos (2015) also posed the question, “When is expression ‘authentic’?” (p. 329) in regard to the nature of the creative expression of the individual(s) generating ideas through the creative process. The element of authority involved the locus of control in the creative process, including the consideration of those in charge of supervising the creative process and the reasons for their ascension to this role. “How does one build a sense of admiration, wonder, and passion for deep search for socio-musical past and present achievements while doing away with authoritative transmission?” (Kanellopoulos, 2015, p. 329).

The element of inclusion considered the encouragement of different viewpoints and perspectives, including the inclusion of the lived social worlds of students within the creative process. “Does the created context permit agonistic struggles for shaping practices and ideas, or is it just based on apolitical views of tolerance?” (Kanellopoulos, 2015, p. 329). The fourth element of difference involved exploring the unknown and trusting the spontaneity that may result. Difference also considered difference in identity and how they are addressed and
discussed within the creative space. “How can one develop an everyday music education culture in which ‘finding time to make mistakes’ (Adams, 2014, p. 2) is an integral aspect of the work?” (Kanellopoulos, 2015, p. 329).

This study explored creative musical agency among secondary instrumental music students through composition activities. This lens, provided by Kanellopoulos (2015), served to inform the nature of the specific interview questions, the coding procedures during data collection, and the discussion of findings related to creative musical agency.

**Current Definition of Creative Musical Agency**

This study utilized a definition of creative musical agency that involved the development of musical competence, the role of power, and the expansion of outcomes. The development of musical competence, similar to the previous definitions of musical agency by Wiggins (2012) and Muhonen (2016), involves the acquisition of musical knowledge and skills. Examples of musical knowledge include an understanding and the ability to identify harmonic progressions, while examples of musical skill include the ability to perform a scale within a given key signature and within an appropriate musical style. Fostering creative musical agency is dependent upon competence within music, and for this current study, within instrumental music.

The role of power involves the question of who has ultimate control over the creative process: the teacher or the students? As described in the opening vignette, the exchange of power from teacher to students was challenging but necessary to allow for the full creative potential of my students. The context of secondary instrumental ensembles, with its history of autocratic directors who aim to control the musical learning process, places the role of power front and center. Drawing on the notions of power and liberation (e.g., Freire, 1970), this exchange of power was crucial for students to be afforded the opportunity to exercise their creative freedom.
The specific contexts and how power was negotiated within the educational environment will be discussed in relation to the specific contexts of this study in later chapters.

Finally, the expansion of outcomes is the ultimate goal of creative agency. When students are afforded the opportunity to enact their creative musical identities within their figured world of a creative musical activity (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010), they are able to realize their full potential in producing musical outcomes beyond those previously possible. The specific musical contexts and nature of the outcomes were dependent upon the specific contexts of this study, which will be discussed in Chapter III.

Each one of these perspectives of creative musical agency plays a role within instrumental music education. Opportunities to promote social justice through creative agency certainly exist within instrumental music education. These opportunities may involve a variety of instructional settings, from individual private lessons focusing on personal creative potential to large ensemble social contexts focusing on the amplification of historically underrepresented creative voices in instrumental music. Alongside a focus on social justice issues are practical notions of developing musical knowledge and skills while allowing students the autonomy to act on their musical knowledge and skill in an original way. These foci offer instrumental music educators multiple inroads for beginning the journey toward developing creative musical agency. There is a necessary balance of focusing on fundamental skills for students to become competent and confident in instrumental music while fostering curiosity and exploration of the musical structures to achieve a deep level of ownership. This balance is up to each and every instrumental music educator and is dependent upon their philosophy of the role of power and control in the process of learning music.
Definition of Terms

The creative contexts of the participants in this study included individual students within a large ensemble creating melodic material over a provided harmonic progression, small groups within a large instrumental ensemble working together on the creation of melodies, and an entire large ensemble collaborating on the creation of a musical work based on short “riffs” that are student created. The particular contexts will be described in Chapter III.

For this study, composition will refer to creative musical activities in which students are tasked with creating an original and reproducible piece of music. The activity may include preexisting musical material, such as a harmonic progression or a formal structure, and may be completed using traditional notation, graphic or alternative forms of notation, or through memory.

Within this study, the term social considerations will include aspects of instructional settings that involve shared experiences. These aspects of social considerations include the notion of collaboration, dialogism, shared goals, and the classroom environment, all within the context of composition activities. Collaboration involves individuals communicating with each other while working toward a common goal. Dialogism refers to the process of communicating and sharing information between individuals with the goal of the “emergence of new possibilities” (Spruce, 2021, p. 109). Shared goals refer to the social nature of composition activities involving a musical problem shared among a group of individuals. The classroom environment includes the social setting of composition activities and notions of empathy which involve the ability of individuals “to be sensitive to the inner states of others; as an environment that may allow us to experience feelings that are congruent with the feelings of others; and as a manifestation of a state of shared intentionality” (Cross et al., 2012, p. 340).
The term *power* will be utilized throughout this study. I will refer to the notion of power as understood by Foucault (1980), constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, understanding, and truth, and enacted relationally in context.

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

For example, there are multiple dimensions of power enactment within the context of musical composition activities in instrumental music ensembles: the teacher’s enactment of power within the curricular structures of the school district; the teacher’s enactment of power in setting parameters of the composition activity; and the students’ enactments of power while exploring the boundaries of what is allowed during the composition activity. Chapter VI will explore these varied dimensions of power in greater detail.

**Method**

Past research of creative musical activities within instrumental ensembles have typically utilized quantitative methods (e.g., Hopkins, 2013; Randles, 2010; Strand, 2006). I approached the exploration of creative musical agency among secondary instrumental music teachers and students through a multiple case study (Patton, 2015). I aimed to center the voices of teachers and their students.

Data included multiple individual interviews with teacher participants, focus group interviews with student participants, observations of composition activities in secondary instrumental classrooms, and artifacts including video recordings of composition activities in secondary instrumental classrooms and any final “products” of the composition activities (written composition, audio or video recordings of final performance of composition).
The notion of agency development is present throughout the study. However, I do not claim to have collected data that provided evidence on the development of creative musical agency. The findings of this study include evidence of particular aspects related to agency development, including the structure of creative musical activities, the role of power, the role of parameters, and social considerations within instructional settings. From these findings, I provide a framework for creative musical agency development within composition activities in instrumental music settings. This framework was developed in order to provide a theoretical lens on creative musical agency development in which the findings could be considered. The following chapter will explore past literature regarding creative process models, composition activities, democratic practices in large instrumental ensembles, and creative agency.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings. In this chapter, I will provide a foundational context for the study by presenting relevant literature within the realms of creativity, democratic practices of large ensembles, agency, and creative agency. First, a historical overview of creative process models will precede literature pertaining to the assessment of creativity. Next, collaborative composition scholarship will be presented, which will be limited to the context of secondary (middle school and high school) levels. Following is a discussion of democratic practices within the large ensemble as well as the notion of agency. Next, definitions of creative agency will be presented, followed by considerations for creative agency including assessment, social contexts, empathy, and social justice perspectives. Finally, empirical research on creative agency will be presented, including models from general education as well as music education.

Creative Process Models

Scholarship within the field of creativity is immense as there are many interdisciplinary approaches to studying creativity. In this section, I will present the typical contexts for creativity in music education as well as various process models of creativity in general, and in music education in particular.
**Contexts for Creativity in Music Education**

A century ago, Satis Coleman rebelled against the prevalent musical pedagogy of the time which placed an enormous emphasis on musical notation. Instead, her approach included students creating their own musical instruments, learning to play them and to compose with them, all prior to learning musical notation. Coleman (1922) valued improvisation over all else, stating “Shall we not think twice before we allow the child to consume all his mental power in studying the works of others, and leave no strength or time for his own creative work?” (p. 179).

A few decades later, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) produced a statement on musical creativity in the *Music Education Sourcebook* (Morgan, 1947). This statement defined creative music as multiple ways of experiencing and expressing music, including listening, performing, moving, and composing. Two directives were included: encouraging creativity in children as a form of expression and evaluating the discriminative ability (Richardson & Saffle, 1983).

**Process Models of Creativity**

Wallas (1926) was one of the first to create a model of the creative process, which included four stages: preparation (gathering ideas for the creative product), incubation (letting the subconscious mind work on the problem without conscious effort), illumination (having a new idea or solution), and verification (bringing the ideas together to form the creative product).

Decades later, Guilford, a former president of the American Psychological Association, expanded the scholarship within creativity by including the notion of divergent thinking, or the ability to generate novel associations (Guilford, 1959). Divergent thinking is antithetic from convergent thinking, which relates to a narrow focus of specific solutions (Gibson et al., 2009). Guilford (1977) created the problem-solving model of creativity including six aptitudes for creative thinking: fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration, redefinition, and sensitivity to
problems. This model assumed that aptitudes, such as fluency, were divergent thinking tasks which could be studied quantitatively.

Torrance (1966a) pushed against Guilford’s notion that creativity involved individual creative aptitudes. Instead, he encompassed a series of different types of thinking within one task. Thus, Torrance developed his own definition of creativity: “The process of sensing gaps, or disturbing missing elements; forming ideas or hypotheses concerning them; testing these hypotheses, and communicating the results, possibly modifying and restating the hypothesis” (Torrance, 1966b, p. 16). Decades later, Sternberg and Lubart (1993) created the Investment Theory of Creativity, which stated that creativity is dependent upon six interrelated factors (intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation, and environment), and that creative individuals can achieve a good return on their investment through buying “low” and selling “high.” Put another way, creative people pursue “ideas that are unknown or out of favor but that have growth potential” (Sternberg, 2010, p. 398).

Csikszentmihalyi (1999) developed the Systems Model of Creativity which expanded the location of creativity beyond the individual to include the field and the culture within the creative act takes place (see Figure 2).

We cannot study creativity by isolating individuals and their works from the social and historical milieu in which their actions are carried out. This is because what we call creative is never the result of individual action alone; it is the product of three main shaping forces: a set of social institutions, or field, that selects from the variations produced by individuals those that are worth preserving; a stable cultural domain that will preserve and transmit the selected new ideas or forms to the following generations; and finally the individual, who brings about some change in the domain, a change that the field, will consider to be creative. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 47)
Here, Csikszentmihalyi drew together the disparate threads of the creative individual and the creative contexts, both the specific context of the art form as well as the cultural and historical context in which the creative individual and the creative work reside. “Each of the three main systems—person, field, and domain—affects the others and is affected by them in turn. One might say that the three systems represent three ‘moments’ of the same creative process” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 51). This holistic view of creativity allowed for the socially negotiated process of defining novelty within a creative work, a consideration that directly impacts the assessment of creativity.

**Figure 2**

*Systems Model of Creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 315).*

More recently, Amabile (2018) created a componential framework for creativity. This model was based on three main components: task motivation (one’s own attitudes and
motivation toward the task), domain-relevant skills (knowledge of the domain and skills needed to be successful within the domain), and creativity-relevant skills (cognitive style, knowledge of heuristics for creating original ideas). Amabile’s model also includes a five-step process to creativity: problem or task presentation, preparation (drawing on previous relevant knowledge or experience), response generation (initial generation of response possibility), response validation (testing response possibility against knowledge), and end (goal attainment/success, no possible responses generated/failure, or some progress toward goal). This model was intended to be cyclical until the task goal is met.

**Process Models of Musical Creativity**

Specifically concerning musical creativity, Swanwick and Tillman (1986) developed their Sequence of Musical Development which was built on the concepts of mastery (including the control of sound materials), imitation (including expressive character), and imaginative play (including manipulating the structural relationships of music). They believed that this sequence of musical development would be activated in children as long as they were exposed to opportunities for musical encounters. Soon afterward, Webster (1990) developed a model of Creative Thinking in Music which reclaimed Wallas’s (1926) four-stage linear model at the core of the model with other influencing aspects, including enabling skills and enabling conditions. Over a decade later, Webster (2002) updated this model to include a more expansive view of enabling conditions, including personal factors (subconscious imagery, motivation, and personality) and social and cultural factors (context, task, peer influence, and past experience) that each play integral roles.

Drawing on previous models of individual expert and novice composing, as well as research on group composing, Fautley (2005) synthesized this scholarship into a model of group composing in the classroom. Through studying lower secondary school students in the English
Midlands, Fautley analyzed the actions of students in group composition settings and found that his model accounted for each phase of group composition: initial confirmatory phase (group understands the composition task and begin to come up with strategies), generation (creation of musical ideas) and exploration (accepting or rejecting creative musical ideas), organization (ideas are assembled into a structure), work-in-progress performance (initial run-through of the whole composition or a section), revision (consolidating ideas after work-in-progress performance), transformation/modification (making the work coherent), and final performance. He also noted the differences between the individual and group concerning the generation and revision of creative musical ideas, specifically delineating between the location of “individual,” “shared,” and “distributed” (See Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Location of Composing Elements (Fautley, 2005, p. 44).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General tonal and stylistic knowledge</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Shared</th>
<th>Distributed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquired by the processes of education and enculturation</td>
<td>Subject to negotiation. Effects of Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987)</td>
<td>Only in the sense that it is surmised that the pupils will share at least a minimal notion of the culture-specific auditory effects of music.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Idea | | ← be subject to joint planning and exploration which is likely to lead → or as a result of ‘fitting together’ the instrumental resources at their disposal → |
|------| | ← to the ideas arising from a synergy between the individuated origins of the musical material ← which then cohere into a single unity, jointly held. |

| Thematic material | | ← be subject to joint planning and exploration which is likely to lead → or as a result of ‘fitting together’ the instrumental resources at their disposal → |
|-------------------| | ← to the ideas arising from a synergy between the individuated origins of the musical material ← which then cohere into a single unity, jointly held. |

| Transformation, extension and development | | ← some may be discussed, and the conjointness of the musical materials rehearsed → |
|------------------------------------------| | ← and some are likely to arise as a result of the pupils simply exploring musical ideas in a non-verbal fashion. |
The above authors developed models for explaining the creative process, some within the arts and music in particular while others were meant for creative thinking in general. There was a shift in approaching creativity through studying the internal cognitive processes through overt behavior (e.g., Torrance, 1966a) in the mid-twentieth century to the inclusion of social contexts (e.g., Fautley, 2005). Next, I will examine scholarship pertaining to composition activities.

**Composition Activities**

The previous section explored the various process models and contexts of creativity, both within and outside of music education. This section will present literature on composition activities within music education. Through exploring literature reviews on collaborative composition activities, as well as empirical studies in secondary general music and secondary instrumental music, the contexts and considerations of composition activities will be presented.

**Literature Reviews**

This section describes three literature reviews of empirical research relating to collaborative composition (Rusinek, 2011; Strand, 2009; Viig, 2015). These literature reviews are included here to illuminate the trends of scholarship regarding collaborative composition over the past two decades. Strand (2009) and Rusinek (2011) focused their literature reviews on action research, while Viig (2015) explored a larger sample of studies in various music education journals with an international perspective.

Strand (2009) conducted a content analysis of action research regarding collaborative composition activities within music classrooms. In selecting research studies to be included in this case study approach, Strand used the identifiers “action research” and “music education,” chose to only include self-identified action research studies, and avoided redundancy by selecting only journal reports and not theses. A total of 12 studies fit the criteria for inclusion in this analysis. Strand chose to analyze the research studies using a narrative approach as they
were action research studies and included elements of personal experiences. Coding involved multiple episodes broken into abstracts, orienting statements, complicating actions, and most reportable event, followed by evaluative statements made by the researcher. Strand found patterns that emerged through the narrative analysis, including teachers’ focus on the process instead of the product of composing, evaluations of student compositions (more complex musical elements resulted in more successful compositions), and beliefs that composition activities can help develop students’ ownership over the compositional process.

Rusinek (2011) also reviewed action research studies relating to various contexts of collaborative composition. Nine studies were selected for inclusion using the following parameters: having been completed since 1994; consisted only of action research studies and not of external, non-participant observers; involved collaborative (group) composing activities and not individual composing activities; and a variety of locations, contexts, educational levels, and compositional tasks. Through comparative case analysis, Rusinek compared the nature of the collaborative composition activities, including the specific contexts and aims of the activities, as well as the research questions and designs of each individual study. Rusinek (2011) concluded that “[t]he sample represents a variety of research designs that can constitute a starting point for other teachers willing to investigate their own teaching of composition” (p. 195). However, he went on to warn future researchers that uncorroborated reports of students’ experiences and perceived educational value of composition activities through narrow methods of data collection (e.g., one four-hour composing project) can significantly weaken the strength and significance of the study. In addition, he found that individual creativity is studied more frequently than group creativity, and that collaborative composition “can empower pupils, because composing in groups gives them control over their own learning” (Rusinek, 2011, p. 197).
Viig (2015) reviewed 89 research articles regarding composition within informal and formal learning contexts. Criteria for inclusion of journals were (a) an international scope, (b) accessible online, (c) a high impact factor on the field, and (d) peer reviewed with a professional readership of music education researchers. Six journals met the criteria, including the *British Journal of Music Education* (24 relevant articles), the *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* (seven relevant articles), the *International Journal of Music Education* (17 relevant articles), the *Journal of Research in Music Education* (four relevant articles), *Music Education Research* (26 relevant articles), and *Research Studies in Music Education* (11 relevant articles). The 89 specific studies on composition were published between the years of 2004 and 2014, and were found through searching journal databases with keyword search terms (e.g., “composition,” “compos*,” “songwriting,” “songcrafting”).

Viig analyzed the studies first by organizing them within a data matrix consisting of country of origin, educational context and level, description of participants, purpose statements, methodologies, topics, theoretical frameworks, findings, and recommendations. Next, commonalities across the studies were described in relation to the specific composing practices in the various learning contexts, the challenges of composing activities within formal learning contexts as well as informal contexts, music teachers’ levels of perceived preparedness to teach composition, the influence of the sociocultural environment on the compositional process, students’ experiences of composing, the role of music technology with composition projects, and assessment of composition activities. Specifically concerning students’ experiences of composing, Viig (2015) states,

Ownership tends to be an important keyword in pupils’ and students’ descriptions of composing processes … where one of the main aims of the process for the pupils seems to be the development of “their own piece,” in some cases expressed as more important
than creating something “new” or “original.” There is clearly more information needed about these relationships, and how both the participants experience the impact of interrelations on the music collaboratively created. (pp. 239-240)

These literature reviews highlight the nature of research regarding collaborative composition in recent years. Literature reviews of action research analyzed using narrative analysis (Strand, 2009) and comparative case analysis (Rusinek, 2011) revealed that collaborative composition activities have the potential to promote student ownership over the composition process, but that any findings must be held to high standards of trustworthiness. Viig (2015), in a much larger sample of empirical research, found that the term “ownership” in relation to students’ descriptions of the composition process is prevalent in many studies, and should be explored in future research. The next section will present empirical studies of composition activities within secondary classroom (general) music settings.

**Empirical Studies – Secondary General Music**

The empirical studies included in this section consist of composition activities within secondary school settings. In particular, they involve secondary general music settings. These studies offer an empirical backdrop for the inclusion of composition activities in secondary music education.

Kaschub (1997) studied the compositional processes during two projects with secondary school music programs. One involved six classes of sixth-grade general music while the other involved a high school choir of 85 students. Each project included a partnership with a professional composer who assisted the students in creating original compositions. The students in the sixth-grade general music classes were looking to engage in more meaningful musical experiences other than full-class song singing. To remedy this, the collaborative composition project was developed which involved the creation of folk songs that described their experiences
in middle school. The high school choir students were in grades nine through twelve and did not have prior experiences of collaborative composing within choir. Each project was initially designed by the music teacher and was funded by a local arts organization. The teacher and the composer-guide met prior to the projects and decided that the composer-guide was going to be the primary teacher during the composition lessons. Goals for the projects included (a) awareness of relationship between text and music, (b) improvement of understanding musical notation and musical writing skills, (c) knowledge of compositional techniques used by choral composers, (d) teamwork through shared goal of collaborative composing, and (e) taking the perspective of a professional choral composer.

Some common challenges between the two projects emerged, including the difficulty of balancing the need for students to create ideas individually but only being able to choose one, and the issue of preserving compositions with students’ limited understanding and skill of writing musical notation. The role of the composer in the process was a model for students as well as a listener of musical ideas, drawing students’ attention to potential problems of their compositional ideas. The process of generating original musical ideas was different between the two projects, with high school students spending more time exploring potential options before deciding on a path forward. During revisions of group compositions, the students challenged each other’s musical ideas and through defending and compromising, new musical ideas emerged. “Collaborative efforts allow students to challenge each other’s ideas and to experiment with compositional decisions which may be questioned or criticized by their peers” (Kaschub, 1997, p. 27).

Rusinek (2007) studied a group of students in a Spanish secondary school during a collaborative composition project. The context of Spain was unique in that music education has had shifting roles in the educational lives of students. Music education became compulsory after
the 1990 constructivist reform of education at every level. However, curricular reform in 2002 forced much of the music education curriculum to become focused on declarative knowledge and skill acquisition, with little room for student-centered instruction (Rusinek, 2007).

Rusinek utilized a qualitative, teacher-researcher line of inquiry for this study. The student participants in this study included 100 students aged 14 to 16 years. The composition project consisted of students in groups of eight creating a two-minute piece of music using available instruments, including mallet percussion instruments, guitar, recorder, and piano. Through observations, semi-structured focus group interviews with student participants, and artifact analysis, Rusinek found that some groups included “disaffected learners” (not motivated to complete the composition task) while others flourished. Overall, the students preferred composing in a collaborative setting to an individual setting, citing the importance of adapting the pace of learning for individual needs, as well as individual and shared responsibility.

Lage-Gomez and Cremades-Andreu (2020) studied the participatory process of collaborative composition in a Spanish secondary school. Secondary students were tasked with creating a soundtrack along to a video. Twelve videos were selected, and students voted on one for which to create the soundtrack. Every student could choose their role as a composer or a “sound technician” where they created sound effects with technology.

Data collection included video-recorded observations, interviews, classroom assessments, participant observations in the form of student diaries, and questionnaires. Data analysis included analyzing videos for critical events, including student interactions, actions, and body movements. Findings revealed that the collaborative composition process of the secondary students was similar to the process described by Fautley (2005), with (a) task identification (visualize the film and begin to imagine musical ideas), (b) preparation (individual exploration with classroom instruments), (c) generation of response (revision and decision-making process of which ideas to
be included in the scene), and (d) final version (final recording session). Students’ participation was categorized in three domains: decision-making throughout the process; shared goals through the process and the creation of a shared identity; and enculturation of the creative process through finding their individual role within the group and bringing their own cultural perspectives.

**Empirical Studies – Secondary Instrumental Music**

The following section presents studies that focus specifically on composition activities within secondary instrumental contexts. These empirical studies offer insight into the nature of composing within instrumental music settings, utilizing data collection and analysis methods involving the behaviors and types of dialogue of secondary students.

When studying collaborative composing within the context of high school string chamber ensembles, Hopkin (2015) aimed to learn more about the verbal and musical forms of communication among students, how specific variables (e.g., composing experience, gender grouping, perceptions of the project) influence the composing process, and what variables have an impact on the final composition product. The particular research site was chosen because the composing project was part of their regular curriculum. The student musicians were split between the symphony orchestra class \((n = 59)\) consisting of \(10^{th}, 11^{th},\) and \(12^{th}\) grade students, and the concert orchestra class \((n = 46)\) consisting of students in grades nine through 12. Students in each class were asked to self-select in groups of three to five students each. The specific composition task included each group creating a composition that was two to four minutes in length, notated in some format, and must be performed by the student composers for their peers in the orchestra class.

A presurvey was administered to orchestra students aimed at collecting data on their years playing their current instrument, other instruments played, years of private lessons, prior
composition experience, and prior experiences composing in orchestra class. A majority of the students (78%) reported having prior composing experiences, with 54% of those reporting that their prior composing experience was within orchestra class in prior years. Eight student groups \((n = 37)\) were selected for participation in the study, specifically for varied gender grouping and Music Performance and Composing Experience (MPCE) scores, based on the presurvey results.

Over six school days, the students formed groups, took the presurvey, participated in four composition sessions, video-recorded performances of their compositions, and watched video of their peers’ compositions. Following, the researcher administered a postsurvey to collect data on students’ experiences and perceptions of the collaborative composition project. Data analysis consisted of coding verbal and musical interactions into timed categories, with verbal interactions being coded into “task-directed talk” and “off-task talk” and musical interactions coded as “task-directed playing” and “off-task playing.” In addition, verbal and musical contributions made by student participants were recorded, including any ideas that were communicated to the group musically (e.g., playing an improvised melodic idea) or verbally (e.g., offering feedback on the revision of a musical idea). Two research team members coded 20% of the observations to determine interjudge reliability. In addition, four independent raters (two high school orchestra teachers with experience composing, one retired high school orchestra teacher with experience composing, and one professor of string education with experience composing and arranging) assessed the student compositions.

Findings included students spent more time engaged with task-directed musical communication (including task-directed talk and task-directed play, both related to the completion of the compositional task) than in verbal communication (off-task talk). Hopkins also found that the balance of collaboration, mixed-gender groups, and enjoyment of the project all had a relationship with the quality of the student compositions. All collaborative composition
groups in the study spent more time engaged in musical communication rather than verbal communication. Implications included the need for teachers to differentiate instruction based on the needs of individual students or groups and ensuring the length of time allowed for the completion of the composition project matches the length of time students will actually need to meet the requirements of the project.

In his dissertation on the social aspects of collaborative composition within string ensembles, Phillips (2017) examined the social identities of eight high school orchestra students involved in co-creating original compositions. The students participated in eight after school composition sessions, 45 minutes in length. Data included two individual interviews, two semi-structured focus group interviews with student participants, as well as classroom observations. Phillips analyzed the data using nexus analysis, where the verbal and non-verbal communication of students were examined for the use of mediation means while they were engaged in musical creation. The eight student participants adopted an interaction order by naming themselves “The Circle.” The “Sequence of Compositional Process” (p. 153) involved (a) initiating the activity, where students decided on the theme and overarching style of the composition; (b) playing alone, where students brainstormed musical ideas individually; (c) group sharing, where students presented their ideas from brainstorming and offered encouragement of their peers’ ideas; (d) democratic voting, where students decided as a group which musical ideas to pursue and which to leave behind; and (e) adoption and implementation of the idea, where the musical ideas voted upon are adopted by all members of the group. An emergent theme from data analysis was the existence of multiple roles, including follower, advocate, tutor, and leader. Implications for practice include the importance of allowing opportunities for student ownership over the creative process, for students to work collaboratively together with the goal of peer teaching and tutoring, and allowing students’ lived experiences and home life to influence the compositional process.
Colón León’s (2020) dissertation explored intersections of culture and creativity within a high school instrumental “composing ensemble.” Utilizing an action research design with the researcher acting as a participant in data collection, Colón León worked with students at UpBeat, an afterschool music program in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York City. The student participants were high school instrumentalists who typically participated in their school’s orchestras and jazz bands. Data included interviews with student participants, field notes, and teacher journal. Colón León analyzed the data through a sociocultural lens, and found themes relating to the blended curricula of the composing ensemble, the role of community in an ensemble setting, representation within instrumental performance, and colonialism through the creative process. In describing the results, Colón León (2020) states, …in a large ensemble, with so many people around you making music together, the performers can still feel isolated. As shared by the students of the ensemble, it seems that beyond their instrumental group sections, they have little to no interaction with other performers in other instrumental groups. The idea of access to other musical groups and ways of musical knowledge, the exchange of information and the multidimensional understanding of everyone involved in the process of creating and performing music should be foundation for the composing ensemble. (p. 171)

The literature described above included an overview of the contexts of composition activities in secondary general music as well as secondary instrumental classrooms. There is a clear lack of research specifically in the area of composition and the development of agency. The following sections will explore democratic practices within instrumental music, the contexts of developing musical agency, and the notion of creative agency.
Democratic Practices in Instrumental Ensembles

In his dissertation, Allsup (2002) utilized a narrative design in exploring the creative musical practices of nine participants who self-selected membership into two ensembles. One ensemble utilized rock band instruments of electric guitar, drums, synthesized keyboard, and bass, and the other ensemble chose to use traditional jazz or concert band instruments. Data collection included interviews with student participants, participant compositions, field notes (participant activity, paraphrased conversations, and transcriptions of dialogue), and audio recordings of student conversations and student compositions. Findings included the development of community through respectful discussion, the teacher’s role as leader vs. facilitator within democratic and mutual learning contexts, and prescribed elements of musical style and the use of notation to be detrimental to the creative process of the group.

Weidner (2020) utilized a constructivist grounded theory design to study the role of musical independence within a concert band setting during one academic year (2015-2016). Participants included three band directors who taught in differing communities, with varied curricula and rehearsal structures. Data included multiple formal individual interviews with teacher participants, multiple extemporaneous interviews throughout the duration of the study, and 17 student interviews with 48 students.

Through an abductive approach, Weidner analyzed the data of the participants’ experiences in secondary bands by filling in the gaps between each participant’s perspective. Findings included the benefit of explicit focus on student agency, lifelong musicianship, and critical decision making as a goal of instruction. “These outcomes were the result of specific instructional practices that utilized cognitive modeling, scaffolded instruction, and authentic, regular, student-led music-making in curricular ensembles to promote student agency and decision making” (p. 53).
Allsup (2002) and Weidner (2020) studied varied perspectives on the opportunities that instrumental ensembles present in terms of democratic action and student ownership. The development of student agency in instrumental contexts was approached through different settings, one within student-chosen ensembles (Allsup, 2002), the other within traditional concert bands (Weidner, 2020). Regardless of context, both studies reported the importance of allowing opportunities for student ownership over the musical structures. The following section will present considerations for agency specifically within creative contexts.

**Scholarship on Considerations for Creative Agency**

There are many approaches in defining and examining agency within instrumental contexts. There are also multiple considerations that serve important roles in either enabling or limiting the fostering of agency within creative musical activities. In Chapter I, I presented various definitions of creative agency, from social justice-oriented definitions (e.g., Katz-Buonincontro, 2018) to those specifically within the confines of music education (e.g., Muhonen, 2016). Building on the empirical research described above relating to composition activities and opportunities for democracy within large ensembles, this section will explore various considerations for the development of creative agency. Specifically, the role of assessment, social contexts, empathy, dialogism, and the notion of creative agency and social justice will be described.

**Assessment**

One major area that can either allow or prohibit creative agency is assessment. Assessing creative activities has been examined in P-12 educational contexts as well as specifically within music education. This section will describe particular considerations of the role of assessment concerning creativity through historical threads of scholarship.
Assessing Creativity Outside of Music Education

Torrance (1966a) developed the Tests of Creative Thinking in order to understand creative development in children as they move through the educational system from kindergarten through tertiary education. These tests were meant to assess the creative potential of children in relation to sensitivity of problems, flexibility, originality, elaboration, and redefinition in an open-ended setting. Through the use of longitudinal studies, Torrance found an increase in creativity from grades one to three, decrease between grades three and four, another increase during grades five and six, another decrease between grades six and seven, and a final increase through grades nine through twelve. Torrance advocated for encouraging creativity in the classroom by “rewarding diverse contributions, helping creative persons recognize the value of their own talents, avoid exploitation, accept limitations creatively, develop minimum skills ... reducing isolation and helping them to learn how to cope with anxieties, fears, hardships, and failure” (Torrance, 1966b, p. 161).

Beghetto (2005) stated that when it comes to assessing creativity, it depends on the contexts of the creative activity (e.g., assessing poetry in a language arts classroom is different than as part of an international poetry contest). Some contexts promote performance goal structures where “goal-related messages that stress the importance of avoiding mistakes, besting others, getting the highest grades, and demonstrating one’s ability in relation to others” (pp. 257-258) reign supreme. Other contexts promote a mastery goal structure involving “goal-related messages that focus on self-improvement, skill development, creativity, and understanding” (p. 258). The mastery goal structure allows for constructive feedback and promotes student growth over time. Beghetto recommended minimizing social comparisons between students and the pressure of assessment, instead focusing on informational aspects of the assessment. “Assessments do not necessarily diminish or undermine student creativity; rather, how students
perceive the goal messages sent by their teachers’ assessment practices is what matters” (Beghetto, 2005, p. 259).

Sternberg (2012), one of the creators of the Investment Theory of Creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1993), defined assessing creativity as “evaluating students as they (a) create, (b) invent, (c) discover, (d) imagine if . . . , (e) suppose that . . . , or (f) predict” (p. 8). He offered examples of specific assessments for a variety of avenues of creativity. These examples include the creation of an alternate ending to a short story, creating a dialogue between a French person and an American tourist, and even the creation of a new musical instrument: “Suppose that you were to design one additional instrument to be played in a symphony orchestra for future compositions. What might that instrument be like, and why?” (p. 9). Sternberg stated that his eventual goal with these examples of assessments of creativity was that they will “make their way into standardized tests of abilities, talents, and skills” (p. 3).

Hempel and Sue-Chan (2015) examined the intersection of creativity assessment and the role of culture, specifically through considering the balance of usefulness versus novelty of the creative product and the role of collaborative creativity as a team.

Ideas can be considered highly creative within one domain by a field in one culture, yet not be viewed as creative by a field in the same domain but a different culture. … problems can arise when assessors make use of different cultural and domain baselines when making assessments of novelty. (Hempel & Sue-Chan, 2015, p. 425)

Using the example of the film Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Hempel and Sue-Chan described how Western reviewers responded with a high degree of novelty while Chinese reviewers did not view the film as novel but rather derivative. “Most critically, the team must adopt a single shared conception of creativity, so that there is a common basis for which team members can act to support each others’ actions” (Hempel & Sue-Chan, 2015, p. 430). By
focusing on creativity as a communal outcome, separate members of the team can assume different roles, from idea generation to idea evaluation. This conception of assessment within culturally negotiated realms of creativity can be seen as an extension of Csikszentmihalyi’s Systems Model of Creativity, which involves the intersections of the cultural domain, the specific traditions of the field, and the individual creator.

Bolden et al. (2020) reviewed a total of 51 research articles on assessing creativity, involving formative or summative assessments within P-12 contexts. They found two dominant themes from their meta-analysis including the importance of clearly defined criteria for assessments as well as the importance of self-assessment and reflection. “Results indicate that assessment of creativity is more accurate when assessors (teachers, peers, creators) are provided with criteria to support their understanding of the conception of creativity they are assessing” (pp. 366-367). Present in some studies was the issue of teachers’ assessment of student creativity: “Teachers tend to assess the academic appropriateness of students’ behaviours and products as desirable over their originality or novelty, i.e., to value convergence over divergence” (p. 367). A potential solution that emerged was the role of self-assessment of student creativity. “As a core assessment for learning strategy, self-assessment encourages students to use criteria to reflect on their own work as well as the work process. … As a result, self-assessment has potential to promote both creative products and processes” (p. 368).

Assessing Musical Creativity

Specifically concerning the assessment of musical creativity, Vaughan and Myers (1971) believed that the musical process of creativity was equivalent to creative thinking and was therefore measurable. Their test included six seemingly simple questions based on three principles: “The importance of a warm-up, the importance of a feeling of psychological safety, and the importance of open-ended tasks - i.e., those susceptible of a multiplicity of different
“responses” (Vaughan, 1971, p. 63). A few years later, Gorder (1976) set out to assess musical creativity using the guidelines provided by Guilford (1950) and Torrance (1966a). He developed the lesser-known Musical Measures of Divergent Production, which consists of four short musical passages meant to serve as the basis for improvisation. These assessments, based on external observations of internal processes, were developed in part from the exploration into the internal processes of defining creativity and creative processes during the mid-20th century.

More recently, practices of assessing student musical creativity have been examined. Hickey (1999) offered a form of assessing student musical compositions through the use of rubrics which provide students with detailed feedback while also aiming to be objective. Later, Hickey (2001) empirically studied the use of “consensual assessment” (Amabile, 1996) in assessing students’ musical compositions. Consensual assessment “requires judges to rate the creativity of an artistic product by using their own subjective definition rather than any given objective criteria or checklist” (Hickey, 2001, p. 235). Twelve compositions by fourth and fifth grade students were randomly selected from a pool of 21 compositions from an earlier study (Hickey, 1995). Five groups of judges assessed the compositions, including 17 music teachers enrolled in a summer music education master’s degree program, three professional composers, four music theorists who were collegiate faculty members, 14 seventh grade children, and 24 second grade children. The compositions were rated relative to one another and not against an absolute standard. The rating instrument was adapted from Amabile’s Dimensions of Creative Judgement (1982) and Bangs’s Dimensions of Judgement (1992). Results included differences with interjudge reliability, including the composers .04, music teachers .64, music theorists .73, seventh grade children .61, and second grade children .50. In discussing the results of the study, Hickey (2001) states, “It seems that the best ‘experts,’ or at least the most reliable judges, may be the very music teachers who teach the children” (p. 241).
Leong et al. (2012) stated that the onus has typically been on the teacher to decide whether or not the creative product is original and has value. Similar to Beghetto (2005), Leong and colleagues suggested that there is an important difference in focus between mastery goals and performance goals, and that self-improvement and skill development result from mastery goals. Along the same lines as the findings of Bolden et al. (2020), Leong and colleagues recommended that clear criteria and scaffolding of creative musical activities play an integral part in promoting student success with assessments.

From the findings in the meta-analysis by Bolden et al. (2020) and Beghetto (2005) urging focus on mastery goal structures, Sternberg’s (2012) examples of assessment need revisions to include more clear criteria. If the eventual goal is for standardized tests to include assessments of students’ creative products, the specific parameters on the creative process must be made explicit, with an appropriate amount of autonomy for the learner paired with clear boundaries of what is expected and will be eventually assessed as acceptable. Moreover, the overall goal of the assessment must be made clear to students. Opportunities for useful feedback should be built into the assessment, which generally is not a part of standardized tests.

**Social Contexts**

The development of creativity in music education does not occur in a vacuum. The social nature of many creative musical activities (e.g., group improvisation) plays an important role in either promoting or stifling creative agency. Sawyer (2000) reflected on his experience of studying improvisational comedy in Chicago where a group of actors bring an improvised storyline to life through dialogue, character development, and dramatic events. “All of the elements of this dramatic structure are emergent—they have emerged from the collective interaction and creative contributions of all three actors. They have been created, but not by any single actor” (p. 182). In discussing the act of group musical improvisation, Sawyer stated,
In ensemble improvisation, we can’t identify the creativity of the performance with any single performer; the performance is collaboratively created. Although each member of the group contributes creative material, a musician’s contributions only make sense in terms of the way they are heard, absorbed, and elaborated on by the other musicians. The performance that results emerges from the interactions of the group. (Sawyer, 2000, p. 182)

Lapidaki and colleagues (2012) promoted a paradigm of creative musical activities in mutual learning environments where P-12 students with limited access to formal music education learned from university students. This project, titled C.A.L.M. (Community Action in Learning Music), aimed “to help students enrich their experiential learning through the development of musical practices that take place in, and through, the intersection of the musical worlds of the university and the school” (p. 371). The opportunity of students to experience leadership roles within musical settings can foster agency. When these experiences occur within creative musical contexts, a deeper level of ownership over creative and social structures may result. “[W]e can explore the potential of music creativity to break down divisions between social groups on the one hand and develop capacities and skills for self-reliant political action and service to others on the other” (p. 375). There is great potential for the fostering of creative agency within this multi-generational context with the eventual goal of allowing the P-12 students the opportunity for autonomous creative musical activities.

Empathy

Related to the discussion of creative agency within social contexts is the role of empathy. Lieberman (2007) defined empathy as “the ability to have emotional and experiential responses to the situations of others that approximate to their responses and experiences, understood as motivated by their internal states” (p. 264). Cross and colleagues (2012) described empathy as
the “sense of togetherness [that] can be understood as arising from the actualization of empathic processes and states in the course of collective engagement in music-making” (p. 338). Specifically within music, they built on the notion of music as a social practice with the need for musicians “to be sensitive to the inner states of others; as an environment that may allow us to experience feelings that are congruent with the feelings of others; and as a manifestation of a state of shared intentionality” and that “music may act as a scaffold that can help us to acquire the habit of empathizing” (Cross et al., 2012, p. 340). Through combining musical creativity with paths toward empathy, “empathic creativity” results, which can be defined as “the experience of mutual affective alignment underlined by a creative process” (Cross et al., 2012, p. 341).

Burnard (2015) discussed the role of intercultural creativities in music education. “Intercultural practice refers to conceptual processes, as well as to processes of making and becoming” (p. 357). She urged a focus on the geographical location of community as well as the social connectedness through communal music-making endeavors, which can result in furthering social justice initiatives. Specifically, Burnard posited that three areas require further examination: focusing on diverse musical creativities to support reciprocal needs and respect; delineating empathic creativities with intercultural creativities to promote the need for continued focus on social justice initiatives; and focusing on the multiplicity of directions that intercultural musical creativities can be pulled and the perspectives from various communities that are able to be represented through such actions.

The notion of empathic creativity (Cross et al., 2012) has important implications for creative agency since it involves understandings and appreciations for multiple viewpoints and personal perspectives. Burnard’s (2015) call for intercultural creativities, in a similar vein, involved a focus on communal experiences and developing interpersonal connections with specific references to social justice. These intersections of empathy and creativity allow for a
focus on honoring the individual’s perspective while developing social connectedness through group musical experiences.

**Dialogism**

The notion of dialogism in education emerged through the work of Bakhtin (1986), a Russian philosopher who stated, “If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue” (p. 183). The goal of dialogic discourse is not to arrive at convergent solutions but rather to consider multiple and varied perspectives together. Put another way, “Dialogism is a process of constant renewal and emergence of new possibilities” (Spruce, 2021, p. 109).

The antithesis of dialogism is monologism, where there is one authoritative voice in the educational setting and a distinct absence of dialogue. Similar to Freire’s (1970) “banking” concept of education, monologism involves the dissemination of one perspective to many empty vessels, an environment consisting of “the Master, the tradition, the literature and its codes” (Allsup, 2016, p. 83). The fixed nature of regurgitating musical “masterworks” can be seen as contexts involving monologic perspectives, since “the score takes on the mantle of the authoritative word of the composer” with “limited space for the exercise of musical agency” (Spruce, 2021, p. 111).

Creative musical activities are ripe for dialogism as they typically focus on participatory forms of music making. “Participatory creativity as a process of invention and innovation centred around the development of ideas that are generated by a diverse network of actors, each of whom contributes to the idea development process in unique and varied ways” (Clapp, 2017, p. 45). The role of the teacher is also paramount within dialogism. As Spruce (2021) noted, “key to the effectiveness of these classroom interactions is the teacher’s mediation of the social relations within the class supporting each child’s right to participate and ensuring their voices – both
musical and spoken – are heard” (p. 114). Musically creative activities can allow individuals the power to offer their unique musical, social, and cultural perspectives in dialogue with their peers.

**Creative Agency and Social Justice**

Many authors have linked the need for the development of creative agency with social justice. Benedict and Schmidt (2011) urge music education researchers to engage with explicitly political notions of education.

Schooling has and continues to prepare students for basic skills thought to be essential. In music, schooling is determined in terms of musicianship, vastly defined according to parameters based upon recognition and response. This in turn predicates “good” musicianship according to the ability to sight-read and sight-sing. This, of course, is directly related to notions of functional literacy that are framed by current political discourse of efficiency, standards, and market education. All which brings “quality music education” much closer to capital than our artistic and humanist dispositions would like to admit. (Benedict & Schmidt, 2011, p. 144)

They believe that if the field of music education does not keep a strong focus on resisting the political discourses surrounding education, the field will take on an institutional form void of creative agency which will force students to accept the narrow focus of musicianship.

Drawing on the work of Benedict and Schmidt (2011), Kanellopoulos (2015) stated that music educators should focus on four key elements of ownership (forming and negotiating creative spaces that promote authentic expression), authority (realizing who is controlling the creative actions and why), inclusion (engaging with and pursuing a variety of perspectives), and difference (a trust in the process of exploration and spontaneity).

Within art education, Katz-Buonincontro (2018) lamented the lack of opportunities for students to develop creativity within arts-based learning, specifically pointing to the achievement
gap of white and Asian/Pacific Islander students scoring higher in music and visual arts than Hispanic and Black students (NAEP, 2016). The disproportionate effect of a reduction in arts-based educational experiences, particularly for Black students and students living in high poverty, has fueled a need to explore options which promote artistic creativity in an equitable manner, resulting in the demand for creativity as a human right. “Creativity as a human right in art education means supporting students to use the arts to examine and question their identity as well as their role in their school, communities, and society” (Katz-Buonincontro, 2018, p. 36). Going further, she stated curriculum development that promotes creative agency through social justice perspectives can benefit individual students in their ability to authentically express their creative ideas freely.

**Summary of Considerations**

The perspectives shared above all relate to the notion of creative agency. The role that assessment plays in creativity can either significantly hinder the role of creative agency among students or allow it to flourish. Focusing on clear parameters (Bolden et al., 2020) as well as mastery goal structures within assessments (Beghetto, 2005) can help foster a deeper ownership over the creative process among students. The social contexts of creativity offer students the opportunity to collaborate and develop something larger than themselves. Balancing the focus of usefulness versus novelty of creative experiences (Hempel & Sue-Chan, 2015) can help foster authentic collaboration. Similarly, intercultural (Burnard, 2015) and empathic (Cross et al., 2012) creativities afford opportunities for balancing individual perspectives with group experiences. A musical environment that promotes dialogism (Spruce, 2021) allows individual musicians the power to contribute their own unique perspective while considering the varied perspectives of others, resulting in the creation of new ideas. Multiple authors have applied notions of social justice with creativity (Benedict & Schmidt, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2015; Katz-Buonincontro,
2018). These authors believe it is essential to demand creativity as a human right and combat neoliberal ideals of education with a focus on individual creative authenticity and autonomy as we move further into the 21st century.

Creative Agency in Empirical Research

Some empirical studies have examined the development of creative agency within education in general, and within music education in particular. The number of empirical studies included here are limited but demonstrate an important line of inquiry for creative agency. Studies from general education research will be presented first, followed by one study from within the field of music education.

Creative Agency Within General Education

Cremin et al. (2006) studied the notion of possibility thinking within an early childhood educational context. Burnard et al. (2006) defined possibility thinking as involving the posing of questions, play, immersion, innovation, risk-taking, being imaginative, self-determination, and intentionality. These elements occur within the enabling context of the environment, where a balance of learner agency is sought through the teacher allowing room and facilitating as needed (see Figure 4, below). These elements also serve as a basis for the observation protocol for this study (see Appendix B).

Figure 4

A Model of Pedagogy and Possibility Thinking (Cremin et al., 2006).
Through a case study approach, Cremin and colleagues explored the experiences of three core teachers in early childhood educational centers in the United Kingdom over a 12-month period as part of a “co-participative research team” (Cremin et al., 2006, p. 108). Each teacher’s educational practices were treated as a separate case as they varied in geographic locations and specific educational settings. The teachers were recognized as creative professionals through their involvement with QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) research, which was designed to help promote teachers’ ability to identify and promote student creativity.

Data collection included interviews, involving both individual interviews as well as video-stimulated review (VSR) using videos from teacher’s classrooms. During the VSR sessions, teacher participants discussed their pedagogical decisions and identity in relation to possibility thinking with university researchers. Data also included observations of classroom instruction. A third form of data resulted from “whole group data surgery sessions” (p. 111), where all participants reviewed data and collaboratively developed the conceptual model of possibility thinking.
Findings from this study include instructional practices of “standing back” (observing, watching and listening to students’ creative behaviors), allowing students the time and space to create, and profiling each learner’s individual level of agency, and each of these instructional practices played an important role in developing individual learner agency and promoting possibility thinking. Aspects of this study serve to inform this current study of creative musical agency. Namely, the multiple case study design focused on three teacher participants, and the varied forms of data including interviews and video-recorded observations of classroom instruction of creative musical activities.

Also concerned with the role of possibility thinking, Jónsdóttir (2017) employed an action research approach, specifically through a multiple case study of eight teachers who teach at four levels of schooling in Iceland. The study aimed to “understand how we as teachers could work to enhance student creativity” (p. 127). Data included journal entries, reflective notes, video recordings and transcripts of research group meetings, lesson plans, student work, and other artifacts. Analysis was conducted ongoing throughout the duration of the study (two years), and included a researcher-designed analytical tool of acknowledging who was in control over various elements of the educational context with a Likert-type scale ranging from “Teacher always” to “Student always” (p. 131).

Findings included the role of control within learning spaces and how it promoted or hindered individual student agency. “Giving students power and control by supporting possibility thinking and nurturing an ethos of engagement, experimentation, and risk-taking” (Jónsdóttir, 2017, p. 131) was found to be particularly helpful in promoting student agency. The impact of the level of guidance on the creative process is integral in scaffolding appropriate opportunities for students to develop creative agency. The notion of understanding the level of teacher vs.
student control within educational contexts is a particularly useful element from Jónsdóttir’s study that helped to inform this study.

Creative Agency Within Music Education

Muhonen (2016) studied the recall experiences of former students in songcrafting and the potential of promoting creative agency within school musical settings. “Songcrafting refers to a collaborative composing practice in which everyone is considered to be a capable creator of melodies and lyrics, and where negotiation, collaboration, and openness to the situation are essential” (p. 263). Figure 5 shows how the process of songcrafting from “the will” to “the song” can develop a sense of agency as the process proceeds, including the varied levels of teacher guidance.

Figure 5

Songcrafting Process (Muhonen, 2016, p. 265).

Muhtonen utilized a case study design through participant interviews and artifacts. Data included semi-structured individual interviews with 41 individuals who were former students and
had participated in the songcrafting process periodically during music classes in first to sixth grade. Interviews were conducted approximately four to five years after the participants’ songcrafting experiences. Artifacts of notated pieces and audio recordings were also utilized. The artifacts as well as singing were used during the interviews to help stimulate recall and reflection.

Data analysis involved coding of the interview data, categorized in three groups based on grade level at the time of the songcrafting experiences (e.g., first grade in 1997-1998). Within-case analysis was conducted first, followed by cross-case analysis. The themes that emerged included (a) “agency,” including general agency, musical agency, and creative agency; (b) participation; and (c) collaboration. Three storylines of how these themes were present within the songcrafting process were also found: (a) peripheral participation, where students experienced the process from a distance and rarely participated; (b) experimentation, including the influence of students’ musical families, music as an enjoyable subject, and the act of music making through singing or playing an instrument; and (c) deep participation, involving students’ musical skill development typically through out of school contexts, and strong realizations of musical and creative agency.

Muhonen’s study offers many connections with the current study, including an empirical study on the development of creative agency within music education, the levels of participation in a collaborative composition process that relate to the development of creative agency, and other aspects that influence agency development, including perceptions of the music class itself, family orientations to musical experiences, and outside of school musical opportunities.

These empirical studies have demonstrated a limited research area specifically targeted at the development of creative agency. The notion of possibility thinking (Burnard et al., 2006) in general education literature (Cremin et al., 2006; Jónsdóttir, 2017) offers a particularly useful framework for engaging with creative agency. Muhonen’s (2016) approach to the songcrafting
process with primary-aged students is a unique pathway toward developing creative agency. The above research showcases the need for more empirical research in the realm of creative agency, particularly within instrumental music education.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of creative process models through a historical thread of scholarship. Next, literature relating to the topic of collaborative composition was presented, followed by research relating to democratic practices within large ensembles. Following, considerations of creative agency were described, including assessment, social contexts, empathy, and elements of social justice. Empirical research on the development of creative agency followed, including studies that serve as a frame for this current study. The next chapter will present the methodological considerations of this study.
Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings. Research questions included (1) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the instruction of composition activities to foster creative musical agency? (2) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the social considerations of composition activities in fostering creative musical agency? (3) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the negotiation of power in relation to composition activities to foster creative musical agency? In this chapter, I will describe the specific methodological elements of this study, including design, selection of participants, description of participants, types of data, procedural time line of the study (including data collection and data analysis), and trustworthiness. I will also describe the organization of findings and discussions for the chapters to come.

Design

This study employed a qualitative design, specifically case study. Elements of qualitative designs specific to case study include “the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). Defining case study in particular, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that “A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 37). Yin (2014) describes the case study design as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) within its real-life
context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16).

Specifically, this study utilized a multicase study design. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define a multicase study as follows: “Comparative case studies, also called multicase or multisite case studies, involve collecting and analyzing data from several cases and can be distinguished from the single case study that may have subunits or subcases embedded within (such as students within a school)” (p. 40). Patton (2015) describes the importance of comparing multiple sites: “Comparisons are information-rich in that they provide insights into both the unique attributes and the common characteristics of the selected cases” (p. 282).

Defining the specific bounded system of the case is integral. According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), the case can be “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 28). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) add that “The unit of analysis, not the topic of investigation, characterizes a case study” (p. 38). The specific bounded context for this study were the particular classroom and rehearsal space, the teacher, the students, and the musical activities themselves. The phenomenon of investigation included the composition activities within each site, including the classroom environment, the instructional strategies, the compositional processes, and the musical products created. This study included three “cases” across three sites. Descriptions of each site and each case will be presented later in this chapter.

The benefits of a multiple case study include an in-depth understanding of how a particular phenomenon exists within multiple contexts. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) describe a multiple case study as a more compelling interpretation because of a wider variety of multiple cases as part of a study. “By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why
it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 33).

**Selection of Participants**

The specific sampling strategy employed in this study was key informants sampling, or “key knowledgeable” sampling, which Patton (2015) defined as “people who are especially knowledgeable about a topic and are willing to share their knowledge” (p. 284). The specific key informants I aimed to study were secondary instrumental music teachers who taught band or orchestra classes within secondary schools in the United States and who utilized composition activities within their instruction. “Secondary” includes middle and high school levels, while “instrumental” involves band and orchestra large ensembles. Other instrumental classes, including guitar and electronic instruments, were not included in this study.

The participants for this study were selected from recommendations by music education researchers in the area of musical creativity (i.e., Bernhard, Kaschub, Snell, Stringham, Thornton), which served as a form of snowball sampling. Patton (2015) defined snowball sampling as “an approach for locating information-rich key informants” where “[b]y asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information-rich cases” (p. 298). The music education creativity researchers recommended specific key informants, and I reached out via email and/or video conferencing software (e.g., Zoom) to the key informants as potential participants in the study in order to learn more about their specific teaching contexts and timeline of their composition activities. If the key informant was planning to utilize composition within their curriculum in the time frame of data collection for the study (March to June, 2022), and their composition activity matched the definition of composition for this study, then that key informant was asked to participate in the study. There
were a total of three secondary instrumental music teachers that served as participants for this study.

The process of finding and selecting teacher participants for this study took approximately four months and was incredibly time consuming. Many key informants who were recommended by music education researchers did not respond to emails, and others required multiple follow-up emails to eventually obtain information on whether they were going to be pursuing any sort of composition activity with their students in the spring 2022 semester. Some key informants who said they were going to pursue a composition activity in their instrumental classes in the spring 2022 semester did not feel comfortable participating, and from conversations via email or Zoom I ascertained that they were not comfortable because they were unsure if they were truly nurturing creative musical agency within their instrumental classes. Many potential participants that I corresponded with were apprehensive to commit to participating in this study because they felt self-conscious with how they approached creative musical activities with their students, most likely stemming from the lack of experiences that most preservice teachers have with learning how to teach musical creativity (Madura, 2007).

In addition, I sought to include sites that were varied demographically and socioeconomically, and included teachers whose philosophies regarding creative musical activities were different. I found multiple sites with willing potential teacher participants who taught in highly affluent school districts, many of them private schools, with fairly non-diverse student populations. It was much more difficult to find sites in lower socioeconomic communities, or districts with highly diverse student populations. The reasons for these disparities are beyond the scope of this current study, but are certainly ripe for research. In the end, I was able to secure three instrumental music teachers who have varied philosophies and approaches to creative musical activities and who teach in varied school districts.
demographically and socioeconomically. Two of the teacher participants taught at the middle school level, and one teacher participant taught at the high school level. All three teacher participants primarily taught band classes, and the composition activities that I observed took place within the context of band. While each case was within the specific context of band, the findings of this study are relevant to other instrumental contexts as well, including orchestra.

Selected students within each band class who participated in the composition activity were also invited to be participants in the study within the context of focus group interviews. These student participants were selected by the teacher participants through maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling involves “Purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interests” (Patton, 2015, p. 267). Each teacher participant selected three to five of their band students to be included in this study that represented a variety of perspectives and experiences through the composition activities.

**Description of Participants**

The teacher participants for this study included three secondary instrumental music (band) teachers in the United States, and each teacher participant was given a pseudonym (see Table 1). The three sites for this study were specifically in the context of band, including two middle school band sites and one high school band site. Student participants included three to five band students from each research site, and they were also given pseudonyms. In the following section, I will describe each case, as well as the particular composition activity, in greater detail.

**Table 1**

*Description of Sites and Participants.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Participant</th>
<th>Walberg Middle School</th>
<th>Skylerville Academy</th>
<th>Effington High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Porter</td>
<td>Mr. Stevens</td>
<td>Mr. Vance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Northeastern United States</th>
<th>Midwestern United States</th>
<th>Midwestern United States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Size of School Building | 923 students in grades 6, 7, and 8 | 721 students in grades K through 8 | 863 students in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics of School Building</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native – 0.1%</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native – 0.1%</th>
<th>American Indian/Alaska Native – 0.9%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian – 2.6%</td>
<td>Asian – 30.4%</td>
<td>Asian – 0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black – 3.8%</td>
<td>Black – 17.2%</td>
<td>Black – 1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino – 7.6%</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino – 4%</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino – 2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander – 0.1%</td>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander – 0.0%</td>
<td>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander – 0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White – 81.9%</td>
<td>White – 42.9%</td>
<td>White – 93.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiracial – 3.9%</td>
<td>Multiracial – 5.4%</td>
<td>Multiracial – 0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| % of “Free Lunch Eligible” students | 24.15% | 15.11% | 24.80% |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level(s) and Types of Ensemble</th>
<th>8th Grade Band</th>
<th>7th Grade Band</th>
<th>8th Grade Band</th>
<th>9th-12th Grade Bands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students in Ensemble</td>
<td>28 students</td>
<td>25 students</td>
<td>20 students</td>
<td>50 students in Concert Band; 38 students in Wind Ensemble</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Composition Activity</th>
<th>16-measure improvisatory section of a band piece where students worked individually on their own 16-measure melody; Revisions during small group lessons</th>
<th>“Sound composition” activity where students used “whoosh”, “ding” and “boom” to independently create and notate their sound compositions and collaborated in groups to conduct their compositions</th>
<th>“Video Game Soundtrack” activity where students collaborated to create a composition that depicted to a student-selected video of a video game</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Riff Building” activity where students independently created rhythmic and melodic riffs and collaborated to combine riffs into a final composition; Selected students acted as a “sound board” to control the entrances and volume of each riff</td>
<td>“Riff Building” activity where students independently created rhythmic and melodic riffs and collaborated to combine riffs into a final composition; Selected students acted as a “sound board” to control the entrances and volume of each riff</td>
<td>“Riff Building” activity where students independently created rhythmic and melodic riffs and collaborated to combine riffs into a final composition; Selected students acted as a “sound board” to control the entrances and volume of each riff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case #1: Walberg Middle School

“Walberg” Middle School (pseudonym) is a sixth through eighth grade public school in a suburban town outside of a mid-sized city in the northeast United States. The Walberg School District is a K-12 district with a total enrollment of 7,901 (as of the 2020-2021 school year). The district is 82% white, 7% Hispanic or Latino, 4% Black or African American, 3% Asian or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, less than 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4% “multiracial,” according to publicly available school enrollment data.

Walberg Middle School’s music program consists of general music classes for each grade as well as multiple bands, orchestras, and choirs. “Mr. Porter” (pseudonym) is one of the Walberg Middle School band directors and is the director of the eighth grade concert band, as well as the sixth, seventh and eighth grade jazz bands. The students in the Walberg School District begin band in fourth grade. Within the middle school concert band program, there are two sixth grade bands, two seventh grade bands, and one eighth grade band. Each band meets for one hour during the day, once every three school days. Within the jazz band program, there are two sixth grade jazz bands, one seventh grade jazz band, and one eighth grade jazz band. Jazz bands meet for approximately 25 minutes during the day, once every three school days. The students in the eighth grade concert band have small group lessons once per week, with two to four students per lesson group. The lesson groups were created by Mr. Porter, and students were grouped at the start of the school year (September) based on their grade level, similar instrumentation, and musical ability. The eighth grade concert band at Walberg Middle School served as a case for this study. There were a total of 28 students in the eighth grade concert band. Three eighth grade concert band students participated in the student focus group interview for this site.
Mr. Porter has taught band for 17 years, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Music Education from a nearby institution. Mr. Porter’s research interests included creative musical activities in instrumental music, improvisation and composition in particular. His dissertation research involved the creation of a professional development program to encourage teachers to implement improvisation and composition activities in large instrumental ensemble settings. Mr. Porter was recommended by multiple music education researchers who specialize in creativity as being a teacher who implements composition activities in a meaningful way for his students.

Walberg Eighth Grade Band “Adventures Road Composition”

Each of the eighth grade concert band members at Walberg Middle School participated in a composition activity in the spring 2022 semester. This activity was developed by Mr. Porter in preparation for their spring concert performance in May. Mr. Porter wrote a piece for middle school concert band, *Adventure Road*, that included a 16-measure improvisatory section in the middle of the work, with repeats as needed. The composition activity was built from this improvisatory section. The section was in 4/4 time, in E-flat major, and included a harmonic progression based on the chords I, IV, and V7 in E-flat major. In each of the students’ band parts, the bass line and chords were included for each harmonic change (every two to four beats). Mr. Porter designed this activity to begin with having the students improvise using the chord progression written on their parts, followed by having them write out their best musical ideas on a separate page of blank sheet music. Each student in the eighth grade concert band participated in this activity. The percussionists were either playing melodic instruments like xylophone and marimba or battery instruments like snare drum and bass drum. For the battery instruments, the students created a rhythmic pattern to perform along with the harmonic progression. The use of technology during this activity was quite limited as students were instructed to write their musical ideas using pencil on staff paper within their worksheets provided by Mr. Porter. The
students revised their compositions within their small group lessons with Mr. Porter, and I was able to observe many of these small group lessons during my time at Walberg Middle School. The spring concert in May 2022 included a performance by the eighth grade band of the piece *Adventure Road* with three student soloists who improvised during the 16-measure improvisatory section of the piece.

**Case #2: Skylerville Academy**

“Skylerville Academy” (pseudonym) is a K-8 building in a small suburban city outside of a large midwestern city in the United States. Skylerville Public Schools consists of 9,108 students in grades K-12. Skylerville Academy is a magnet school which focuses on STEAM education (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics), and operates within Skylerville Public Schools. In order to attend Skylerville Academy, families submit an application to Skylerville Public Schools. Since there is more demand than space available in the Skylerville Academy, each application is entered into a lottery, and applications are chosen nearly at random to be selected to attend (prospective students who have an older sibling that attends Skylerville Academy are given preference during the lottery process). There are a total of between 70 and 90 students per grade level. As Skylerville Academy is centrally located within the town of Skylerville and it includes students throughout the school district, students go on to attend various high schools once they graduate from the Skylerville Academy.

“Mr. Stevens” (pseudonym) is the band director at Skylerville Academy, and has taught band for 11 years. He received bachelors and master’s degrees in music education and pursued research pertaining to creativity and composition activities during his master’s. As of writing, band begins in fifth grade in Skylerville Public Schools, and there is a total of four concert bands at Skylerville Academy, one for each grade level fifth grade through eighth grade. There is also a rock band course that meets separate from the concert band classes. I observed two bands at
Skylerville Academy for this study: the seventh grade concert band (25 students total), and the eighth grade concert band (20 students total). Each band met every school day for 50 minutes during the school day. Five seventh grade band students and five eighth grade band students participated in the focus group interviews for their respective grade levels.

**Skylerville Academy Seventh Grade “Sound Composition”**

The seventh grade band students at Skylerville Academy participated in a “sound composition” project in the spring 2022 semester. The project was based on “sound painting” activities that Mr. Stevens experienced during his master’s degree. The students formed groups of three to six students each, and they each individually composed their own sound composition using three sound effects: Whoosh, Ding, and Boom. Mr. Stevens provided a worksheet for the students to guide them toward making musical decisions, and included questions that helped to frame their approach to the composition. The students decided how each sound should be notated (using symbols), and created a graph of their composition, with the volume of the sound on the y-axis and the duration of the sound on the x-axis. Students then conducted their sound compositions while their group members performed them using their voices and/or found objects in the classroom. A significant portion of this activity was based on the movement and gestures that corresponded to the sound effects. Mr. Stevens led students through conducting exercises of preparing the sounds and showing the desired dynamics. The use of technology within this case was limited as students were instructed to write their sound compositions using pencil and provided worksheet paper by Mr. Stevens.

**Skylerville Academy Eighth Grade Band “Video Game Soundtrack”**

The eighth grade band students at Skylerville Academy participated in a “video game soundtrack” project in the spring 2022 semester. The project consisted of students forming small groups (two or three students per group), selecting a video recording of a video game being
played (Mr. Stevens provided videos to choose from or students selected other videos on their own), and creating a soundtrack that follows along with the video. One particular requirement was that students were supposed to sync one or more of their sounds with specific actions within the video. Students completed a worksheet with guiding questions, such as “Describe this video using three adjectives,” and “What is the style of your composition?” This activity was developed through a collaboration between Mr. Stevens and a close friend who was also a music educator and a composer. Much of the framework and structure of the video game soundtrack activity was built on the work of this friend, and Mr. Stevens adapted the activity specifically for his eighth grade band students.

The students then worked on their soundtrack compositions during band rehearsal time and performed them live in front of the full eighth grade concert band class later in the semester. This activity utilized technology as an integral part of the activity since students were instructed to select a video from a folder on Google Drive of recorded video game play. Their final compositions were in the form of a piece of musical staff paper that they wrote out their ideas using pencil.

**Case #3: Effington High School**

Effington High School is a ninth through twelfth grade public school in a small town in the midwestern United States. Effington High School has two concert bands, a marching band, and a jazz band. Each concert band meets every day for 60 minutes during the school day, while the marching and jazz bands meet outside of the school day.

“Mr. Vance” (pseudonym) is the Effington High School band director and has taught music for 17 years. Mr. Vance described his primary goal early in his career was to conduct the highest performing instrumental ensemble. After attending the state music education conference and seeing a concert of student-composed musical works being performed, his view of band
shifted to include the cultivation of creativity and the appreciation of various musical styles. For the past decade, Mr. Vance has been experimenting with different creative musical activities within his high school bands, and included opportunities for improvisation within every rehearsal during the warm up process.

**Effington High School Concert Band and Wind Ensemble “Riff Building”**

The students in the Effington High School Concert Band and Wind Ensemble both participated in a composition activity in the spring 2022 semester. This activity occurred during band rehearsal and involved the band sitting in a large circle, students facing inward, with no music stands. The activity began with a warm-up activity during which Mr. Vance (and later students) led a call and response (or “anti-consy” as Mr. Vance called it) musical conversation within a given key and meter based on antecedent and consequent musical ideas. This activity transitioned into a “riff building” activity where students created short melodic fragments and shared them with the rest of the ensemble. As a group, the ensemble decided how to assemble their collective version of this composition based on their riffs including which riffs could fit together and which instrument sections should play each riff. Selected students (using the Google Classroom Student Selector feature) were given the opportunity to enter the center of the circle and provide cues to each riff section, acting as a type of “sound board.” Once the riffs were selected and assigned to specific instrument groups within the circle, Mr. Vance demonstrated the appropriate actions of the sound board position. There was limited use of technology within this case as students were improvising then memorizing their riffs using their acoustic band instruments, although Mr. Vance did utilize the Google Classroom Student Selector feature on his Chromebook. Students needed to have an understanding of what a “sound board” was prior to fulfilling that role in the middle of the circle, but there was no direct use of technology.
Data Collection

I visited each site in order to interview teacher participants and student focus group participants, observe composition activities, and collect artifacts. My visits ranged in duration in order to observe the particular composition activities of each case. I spent two full school days at Walberg Middle School to observe the eighth grade band composition activity in full band rehearsal, as well as small group lessons with eighth grade band students working on their compositions throughout the following days. At Skylerville Academy, I visited the school three separate occasions for two-hours each visit during the seventh and eighth grade band rehearsal times. At Effington High School, I spent one full school day observing both Concert Band and Wind Ensemble rehearsals in which the riff building activities took place. Each visit provided many opportunities to observe, collect artifacts, and speak with teacher and student participants.

There were multiple forms of data collected within this study. Data included multiple individual, semi-structured interviews with each teacher participant, and these interviews occurred extemporaneously during my visits to each site. Video recordings of each composition activity in the instrumental music classrooms were also collected as data during my visits. The focus group interviews with student participants also occurred during my visit to each site. I also collected artifacts from each site, including the written composition final products, and audio/video recordings of performances of the final compositions.

Individual Teacher Participant Interviews

I first conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with each teacher participant early in the process of the composition activity, either prior to the start of the activity or within the first day of the activity. These interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and began with a grand tour question of the background of the teacher participants, then focused more specifically on the structure and goals of the composition activity. Questions included the contexts and
timeline of music teacher preparation, prior experiences with creative musical activities, how the students have been prepared for the composition activity, the goals of the activity, the projected timeline of the activity, the specific elements of planning needed by each teacher participant, and the projected student outcomes of the activity. A sample interview protocol for this initial individual interview with each teacher participant is included in Appendix A. During my visits to each site, I also conducted multiple individual interviews with each teacher participant, ranging in length from five minutes to 90 minutes, depending on their teaching schedules. These extemporaneous interviews provided opportunities for immediate answers to questions that arose during my observations of the composition activities.

Seidman (2019) explains that through an in-depth interview, the researcher can gain an understanding of the lived experience and the meaning that other people make of those experiences. Through these in-depth interviews with teacher participants, I gained a unique insight into their experiences in leading creative musical activities, and the specific context and goals of the collaborative composition activity.

**Observation of Composition Activity (Video Recorded)**

I scheduled in-person visits to each research site during which I observed the composition activities and video record them. The site visits consisted of observing full ensemble rehearsals and any small group lessons that are scheduled on those days. I also utilized an observation protocol to take notes during the observation. This protocol was shaped by the elements of “possibility thinking” (Cremin et al., 2006) including posing of questions, play, immersion, innovation, risk-taking, and being imaginative. A sample observation protocol is included in Appendix B.
Student Participant Focus Group Interviews

I conducted focus group interviews with three to five selected student participants within each ensemble. These interviews lasted 20 to 30 minutes and focused on the students’ experiences during the composition activity, their musical backgrounds, their experience with other creative musical activities, and their perceptions of how this activity influenced other areas of their musicianship. The focus groups were created from students within each band that I observed, for a total of five student focus groups: one at Walberg Middle School (eighth grade band); two at Skylerville Academy (one for seventh grade band and one for eighth grade band); and two at Effington High School (one for Concert Band and one for Wind Ensemble). A sample interview protocol for the student focus group interviews is included in Appendix C.

Artifacts

The final type of data for the study included artifacts. These artifacts consisted of composition products, from written compositions to audio or video recordings of a performance of the finished “compositional product,” and worksheets and paperwork that the teacher provided students with during the composition process. I utilized an analysis protocol for artifacts (see Appendix D). “Records, documents, artifacts, and archives, what has traditionally been called ‘material culture’ in anthropology, constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs” (Patton, 2015, p. 376). These records of student involvement in the composition activity assisted me in developing and analyzing interview data, and in providing rich, thick descriptions of the composition activities.

Time Line

The timeline of the procedure for this study involved the following:

Institutional Review Board approval: Late February, 2022
Initial individual interviews with teacher participants: April—May 2022
Classroom observations of composition activities: April – June, 2022
Focus group interviews with student participants: April – June, 2022
Artifact collection: April – June, 2022
Member checks: May – October, 2022

Analysis of data began immediately following data collection, and informed the following steps of data collection.

**Trustworthiness**

I employed member checks to ensure accurate data are collected through individual and focus group interviews with participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state, “Because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews. We are thus ‘closer’ to reality than if a data collection instrument had been interjected between us and the participants” (p. 243-244).

I also utilized data triangulation in this study through the use of multiple forms of data. Patton (2015) defines data triangulation as “the use of a variety of data sources in a study” (p. 316). These multiple sources of data included transcripts from interviews with teacher participants and student focus group interviews, field notes, video recordings of composition activities, and collection of artifacts. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) label an additional type of triangulation involving multiple methods of data collection. Multiple methods triangulation involves corroborating what someone reports in an interview with observations or reading documents. This study included this corroboration between interviews of teachers and students, observations, and artifact analysis.

An additional strategy that was employed to ensure trustworthiness was adequate engagement in data collection, which is “when you are trying to get as close as possible to
participants’ understanding of a phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). Through my visits to each research site, including multiple interviews, observations, focus group interviews, and artifact analysis, I ensured that the participants’ understanding of the phenomena of composition and creative musical agency were fully realized and reported, and “that the data and emerging findings … feel saturated” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246).

Data Analysis

In examining the research questions as part of coding and categorizing, it became clear that the answers to my research questions were embedded within the individual interview data with teacher participants and student focus group participants. The interview data served as the primary data set for analysis. Field notes from observations and comments on artifacts served as secondary data sets as they made their way into the interviews with teacher and student participants. During each site visit, I made notes of questions I had from each observation and through examining artifacts at each site. I followed up on these questions by having them inform the interview questions with participants concurrently during each site visit, which provided a rich primary data set of interview data with teacher and student participants.

Data analysis was conducted as soon as data was collected. I transcribed each interview by using the “live transcript” option of the Zoom video conferencing software, playing the audio or video file while recording a Zoom call and saving the resultant transcript in a Microsoft Word document, with line numbers added to provide better organization and the ability to recall specific quotes at a later date. Upon completion of each interview transcript, I listened to the interview audio recording (at normal speed) while reading the interview transcript to double-check accuracy. Once artifacts were collected from a research site, I began the process of document analysis. I also created a case study database (Yin, 2014) which included a “systematic
archive of all the data … from a case study” (p. 238). This case study database was utilized to easily access specific data during the analysis process.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I coded the data. Codes were developed in relation to the individual research questions. Saldaña (2013) defined a code as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Codes were written along the side of the Microsoft Word documents of the interview transcripts using the “Comment” feature. This coding took place during within-case analysis, where “each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234). I transcribed all interviews (individual teacher interviews and student focus group interviews) and analyzed data in a specific order for within-case analysis, as listed below:

Case #1: Walberg Eighth Grade Band “Individual Composition”
Case #3: Effington High School Concert Band and Wind Ensemble “Riff Building”
Case #2: Skylerville Academy Seventh Grade “Sound Composition” and Eighth Grade Band “Video Game Soundtrack”

This order was chosen because I felt the Walberg Eighth Grade Band “Adventure Road Composition” case held the most depth and richness of data, specifically with the teacher interviews and student focus group interviews. This level of depth in the first case assisted in framing the way in which initial coding was conducted. Following, I chose to transcribe and analyze data within the Effington High School “Riff Building” case specifically because the student focus group interviews were especially rich and the individual teacher interviews held perspectives that differed from the Walberg case. Each activity within Skylerville Academy (“Sound Composition” and “Video Game Soundtrack”) was analyzed last because the individual
teacher interviews included teacher approaches and perspectives that fell between the Walberg and Effington cases.

The process of within case analysis proved to be challenging in that each case consisted of a varied type of composition activity and differing philosophical and instructional approaches toward composition by each teacher participant. In order to code the data from each individual case in a meaningful way, prior to the start of any coding session, I rewatched video recordings of observations of the composition activities for the particular case, played audio recordings for each interview, and read through any artifacts that were collected from that particular research site. This method assisted me in remaining focused on the individual case during within case analysis. A sample page of coding from the Walberg Middle School Eighth Grade Band case is provided in Appendix E.

After all data was collected and within-case analysis was complete for each case, I began cross-case analysis. Yin (2014) stated that, while there is variety among the specific details of individual cases, the researcher strives to sculpt a larger overarching description that all the individual cases can fit into. “Once the analysis of each case is completed, cross-case analysis begins. A qualitative, inductive, multicase study seeks to build abstractions across cases” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 234). The process of cross-case analysis was challenging in building these “abstractions” from the individual cases as the structure of each composition activity was unique to each case. However, there were commonalities found across all three cases in the realms of instructional strategies and materials, philosophical approaches, the role of power during creative musical activities, and considerations regarding the development of agency. This cross-case analysis led to multiple codes being collapsed into emerging themes. “The level of analysis can result in a unified description across cases; it can lead to categories, themes, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016,
These themes were compared to literature, including past philosophical and empirical research, and serve as the structure for the remaining chapters of this study.

**Organization of Findings and Discussion Chapters**

The following chapters will present findings from each case, including teacher interview data, student focus group interview data, observation data, and artifact data. In Chapter IV, I will present findings regarding the actions of teachers in relation to the pedagogy of composition activities, while Chapter V will explore findings concerning to philosophical perspectives, or “teacher thought,” in relation to the pedagogy of composition activities. The notion of teacher thought and action has been discussed in past educational research (e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986), and provides a clear structure to understand the actions (the “what”) and the corresponding thought behind those actions (the “why”) by the particular teacher participants in this study. Chapter VI will explore the role of power, including considerations of power within band, the role of the teacher during composition activities, the voices of students in relation to power, and teacher participants’ descriptions of the location of power during composition activities. Chapter VII will offer an examination of agency development, ending with a new framework for creative musical agency development.

Research Question 1 will be considered throughout Chapters IV and V as the instruction of composition activities involve both teacher action and teacher thought. Research Question 2 regarding the social considerations of composition activities will be explored throughout Chapters IV, V, VI, and VII as there were multiple aspects within the social considerations of these activities. Research Question 3 regarding the negotiation of power in relation to composition activities will be addressed specifically within Chapter VI.

I have purposefully chosen to organize the following chapters based on the emergent themes from data analysis. Each theme will be explored first through the presentation of
evidence within each case, followed immediately by intersections with relevant scholarship and considerations relevant to each theme across cases. This structure is meant to provide the reader the opportunity to focus on individual themes by combining findings and discussion of past literature within digestible capsules, as opposed to forcing the reader to hold onto data from findings for multiple chapters until intersections with relevant scholarship are revealed. From this structure, I hope that readers will be able to engage with the findings in meaningful ways and take relevant aspects of this study with them into their research agendas and/or teaching practices.
Chapter IV

Teacher Action and the Pedagogy of Composition Activities

The pedagogical approaches of teachers can be organized into two categories: Teacher action and teacher thought (Clark & Peterson, 1986). The specific instructional strategies and materials employed by teachers make up teacher action, while the philosophical perspectives and considerations that inform their actions make up teacher thought. This chapter will present findings and discussions relating to teacher action and the pedagogy of composition activities. First, the instructional strategies of teacher participants in this study will be presented, followed by an examination of how teachers encourage collaboration, student participation, and the transfer of musical understanding to different musical contexts. Next, the instructional materials utilized by teacher participants will be presented, with specific focus on the use of harmony as a structural device and the role of musical notation. Finally, the specific assessment strategies employed by the teacher participants will be considered, including the avoidance of social comparisons, the need for appropriate scaffolding and stating of clear criteria for assessment, and the notion of consensual assessment for creative activities. From the presentation of findings and the resultant discussions with relevant scholarship, a holistic view of teacher action in relation to composition activities within secondary instrumental music contexts is offered.

Instructional Strategies

In this section, I will explore the particular instructional strategies employed by each teacher participant in this study. This will be done by presenting data from interviews with teacher participants, focus group interviews with student participants, and my reflections on the
data from observing the composition activities. Following, I will examine relevant scholarship regarding creative musical instruction and consider how each teacher participant’s instructional strategies highlight various threads found in the scholarship, including encouraging collaboration, encouraging student participation, and promoting the transfer of musical understanding.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

Mr. Porter utilized questioning techniques that promoted divergent thinking in his students. He said that he typically approaches instruction through questions that lead to divergent thought, but that this is especially true during creative musical activities such as the composition assignment. “I ask a lot of divergent questions, which I’ve noticed is really, really difficult,” claimed Mr. Porter, since students typically want to be given the “right” answer. This dualistic mode of thinking, where a single path toward an answer or a goal is sought, is common among younger students. Conversely, relativistic thinking, where multiple potential realities are accepted, is typically present in older students. However, the act of asking questions that promote divergent thought is needed for fostering musical creativity as there are multiple potential solutions to a single musical problem.

Mr. Porter provided an example of rehearsing a Bach chorale with his eighth grade band, and he avoided asking simple, straightforward questions, and instead asked questions such as, “Where’s the important note?” This mode of questioning forces his students to listen deeper to the music they are playing, to begin to develop a musical plan, and “to think about music and understand music, and not just put the right fingers down at the right time.” This type of questioning continued into the small group eighth grade band lessons led by Mr. Porter, especially when students made musical decisions to place non-chord tones on strong beats. One example during a lesson with a saxophone group involved Mr. Porter saying, “I see you wrote an
E-flat on beat three over a B-flat major chord. What made you choose that note?” The student in that particular lesson answered, “I thought it sounded right,” which was a demonstration in flexing against the parameters of chord tones and developing their personal ownership over the creative process.

**Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy**

From the student focus group interviews at Skylerville Academy, it became clear that Mr. Stevens’s goal of deeper musical understanding through creative musical activities was being achieved. Seventh grade band students were asked about the role of collaboration during the creative process. Jack, a seventh grade saxophone player, said that conducting his peers to perform his composition was a tricky balance of asserting his own expressive intent over his peers’ own expressive approaches to his composition. “It’s up to the conductor, the student conducting. Or the way the conductor is conducting, if it isn’t right. Or if people try to correct the way you conduct it, even though it’s supposed to be your version.” This notion of shared responsibility and the influence of peers on the creative process was evident throughout observations of the seventh grade sound composition activity.

The eighth grade student focus group interview revealed that some students enjoyed the freedom of musical creativity to the point that they composed music outside of school on their own accord. Xander, an eighth grade flute player, said that he often thinks of melodic material at home, and that he decided which video to choose for the video game soundtrack based on the nature of his previously composed melodies.

I just started playing around with some of the tunes that I made, I found a really good tune that I decided to base our composition off of. I just made it up. Then I just found something in a video that went well with it. I thought it was kind of adventurous, so I
chose the Zelda video clip. I thought it went well together, so I picked it. (Eighth grade student focus group interview, April 28th, 2022)

Another eighth grade student, Tanya, was eager to share compositions that she wrote for her instrument, the flute. She wrote the compositions for solo flute using notation software on her computer at home, and printed them out for her and her friends to play at school.

Mr. Stevens described how he will often explicitly highlight a composer’s compositional device used in a wind band piece that an ensemble is currently working on, and he will refer back to that compositional device later during creative musical activities. Similar to Mr. Porter, Mr. Stevens also employed a significant amount of questions that promoted divergent thought, especially when facilitating groups on their compositions. By treating his role as that of “guide on the side,” he sought to nudge his students in a direction where they would find more success without dictating a specific path for them. The more meaningful interactions the students have with specific musical knowledge and skills, the deeper they will be able to understand and transfer this knowledge and skill to all musical contexts they encounter.

In a follow-up email correspondence with Mr. Stevens four months after the initial observations, he expanded on some of the instructional techniques that he employed during the composition activities. He noted that the eighth grade band students were eager to select videos that they had a personal connection with, and sometimes they chose videos that were not on his initial list of videos to choose from. “We had one group do ‘Temple Run’ and another do ‘Cooking Betty.’ They really took ownership and created unique soundscapes for these excerpts” (Follow-up correspondence, August 12, 2022). He also noted that in order to promote student choice within an age-appropriate structure, he needed to expand his own knowledge of potential videos to include for this project so that they are relevant in students’ lives.
Mr. Stevens was surprised by the amount of sound effects that the eighth grade students incorporated within their compositions, and how they flexed against the notion of a “soundtrack” to include these sounds.

I expected this part of the assignment to give them trouble, honestly—just for the fact that sound effects may feel "silly" or very "out there" relative to just playing a melody on their instruments—but they really got into it! Two groups actually just had designated sound effect performers, who would add trills and body percussion in appropriate places, while their partner(s) played. (Follow-up correspondence, August 12, 2022)

Mr. Stevens went on to explain that if he were to implement this video game soundtrack project in the future, he may incorporate the use of sound recording technology to offer a wider variety of options for performing their final composition products.

I will also encourage students to consider more seriously the idea of multitracking and/or recording their project, as opposed to only performing it live. That will require a whole lot more equipment, and a whole lot more time, but the end results might be even more creative. (Follow-up correspondence, August 12, 2022)

Through interviews and observations, it became clear that Mr. Stevens molded instruction and creative musical activities to fit the students in front of him, and he constantly revised and reflected on his teaching practice to ensure quality musical experiences that transfer to the students’ lives outside of school.

Mr. Vance – Effington High School

Mr. Vance would typically begin band rehearsals with a brief improvisatory warm-up that he called “anty-consy,” which stands for antecedent-consequent. This activity involved the selection of a specific key and meter, and began with Mr. Vance playing (usually on trombone, his primary instrument) a short melodic phrase which served as the “antecedent” phrase. The
students then responded with an improvised melodic phrase of a similar length to that of Mr. Vance’s, which served as the “consequent” phrase. This activity could involve all students responding at once, only a small section of the band responding together, or students responding one at a time. For the students in the advanced group, the Wind Ensemble, Mr. Vance also previously explored harmonic progressions over this activity, including tonic, subdominant, and dominant chord functions.

During the riff building composition activity, Mr. Vance encouraged full participation from students by providing brief, specific reminders and feedback on their playing. He also elicited single students to share their riffs by using the Google Classroom “Random Student Selector,” which is a function as part of the Google Classroom software that selects a random student from the class roster. He would let the software select a single student, and he would encourage that student to share their riff with the ensemble by playing it solo. After they played, the entire ensemble would play the riff back to the student verbatim, and once it was learned by all, Mr. Vance would label it with the name of the student who created it (e.g., “Amy’s riff”).

The typical hierarchy of the teacher as the sole leader of the ensemble was neutralized as the ensemble was sitting in a circular set-up instead of the typical set-up of multiple arched rows all facing the front of the room. Within the concert band riff building activity, Mr. Vance explicitly told a particular student that he would not call on him to share his riff.

I will tell you, no offense [student’s name], but spoiler alert: I will not be choosing you for this riff. Because we’re not all going to rely on [student’s name] to come up with the riff that we’re going to use. (Rehearsal observation, May 17th, 2022)

After multiple riffs were shared and learned from different instrument sections across the ensemble, Mr. Vance would begin to have sections of the band play specific riffs together at the same time. As an ensemble, the students would offer feedback on how the composition was
being built, and what aspects needed revision. An example was during the Concert Band riff building activity when a student offered feedback, “something needs to happen on beat four.” Mr. Vance suggested that the percussion section should add a strong quarter note to beat four so there is something to play off of. After the “riff machine” was fully built with multiple riffs being played simultaneously, student volunteers would serve as the “soundboard,” sitting in the center of the ensemble and cuing each individual riff to begin playing, get louder, get softer, and stop playing.

I asked Mr. Vance if he has utilized technology in his instruction during creative musical activities. He stated that he has previously utilized digital audio workstations (DAWs) where students uploaded short recordings of “found sounds” (sounds that are found in the normal daily lives of students, such as pencil scratching, keyboard clicks, or doors opening and closing). The students were instructed to manipulate the found sound within the DAW, such as speeding the sound up, slowing the sound down, or transposing the sound up or down multiple octaves. Finally, the students were to craft a composition from the manipulations of the found sound. Mr. Vance said that these types of composition activities also have musical value for students. “You’re still teaching fundamentals, you’re still teaching blend and balance and all that, but you’re teaching students who are not the best musicians to demonstrate what’s in their head in another way.”

When asked how to include all students in the composition activity, Mr. Vance said that he views each concert band ensemble “as a great big chamber ensemble.” Expanding on this idea, Mr. Vance said, “I know what each individual is doing and I’m formally assessing each individually, but there’s safety in numbers and they’re able to be comfortable and share their ideas.” The time of the school year that I observed the riff building activity was unique in that it was after the final concert performance for each band, and many of the students, especially the
seniors, were “checked out” of typical school participation. However, I did not notice a lack of motivation to participate in the riff building activity in either ensemble. Mr. Vance agreed, saying, “Even though students might complain about riff-building activities like this, they’re all participating, it gets everyone involved.” He also noted that the difference in levels of participation is typically not due to the age or grade of the student, but usually the personality type. “Introverted students may be less likely to eagerly share their ideas, while you may get more extroverted students to jump at that chance.”

The difference between the ensembles, as stated earlier, was that the students in the Wind Ensemble needed to audition to enter the ensemble, and the audition was based primarily on performance skills. Mr. Vance defined these skills as “Traditional band skills, like fingerings, tongue position, hand position, reading rhythms accurately,” or, put another way, “The things all bands would be judged by in 1975.” Creative musical activities typically focus on aural skills, which are not included as part of the Wind Ensemble audition. Mr. Vance believed that by focusing on creative musical activities, especially opportunities to compose, students are afforded a more holistic and organically musical way to interact with musical elements with the hope that they will transfer this deeper level of musical understanding to the music that they personally consume and enjoy outside of school.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

The specific instructional strategies employed by each teacher participant above highlight the varied approaches of promoting agency through composition activities. In this section, I will examine these instructional strategies as they relate to relevant scholarship on the instructional strategies of creative musical activities. First, I will explore how each teacher participant encouraged collaborative creation, and how peer influence and individual needs play a role in the development of ownership over the creative process. Next, encouraging student participation in
the creative process will be discussed, particularly the importance of shared responsibility, the inclusion of lived experiences, and student-led music-making experiences to promote participation. Finally, I will consider the notion of transfer of musical understanding as a goal of creative musical instruction.

Encouraging Collaborative Creation

Both Mr. Stevens and Mr. Vance invited groups to collaboratively create their compositions. Mr. Stevens structured the seventh grade sound composition and the eighth grade video game soundtrack activities by having students form small groups and collaborate on their creations together. Mr. Vance involved individual students within entire ensembles to share their individual creations and collaborate on building the final composition as a group. Kaschub (1997) found that when students collaboratively create, the influence of peers can cause students to both defend their initial creative ideas or compromise their ideas through revision and rejection. This peer influence was certainly present among Mr. Stevens’s seventh grade students during their small group collaborations on sound compositions as the students had to negotiate creative control while they conducted their own compositions. Similarly, the eighth grade students had to find common ground on their collaborative compositions for the video game soundtrack. As Mr. Stevens reported, some groups assigned group members specific musical roles, such as sound effects or melodic material, which provided a helpful structure in dividing the compositional duties between group members. In Mr. Vance’s high school bands, the students were immersed in negotiation of keeping or revising melodic riffs, both as a whole group and within smaller sections of the ensembles. The student volunteers for “soundboard” also took this negotiation further by manipulating the volume and timing of each riff’s entrance in the final performances of the collaborative compositions.
Rusinek (2011) recommended that students be allowed to collaboratively create in order to have “control over their own learning” (p. 197). In Mr. Porter’s small group lessons, students played their individual compositions simultaneously, and would revise their compositions based on questions from Mr. Porter that promoted divergent thought. In both of Mr. Stevens’s composition activities the students were allowed to choose, whether it was deciding the specific order, volume, and duration of sound effects for the seventh grade sound compositions, or choosing the specific video and subsequent melodic material for the eighth grade video game soundtrack. Mr. Vance provided the parameters of key and meter, and the high school band students took control over the creative process by individually improvising, and subsequently sharing and revising, short melodic riffs. In each context, the students were using the social nature of creating music with other musicians to demonstrate ownership over their own creative decisions.

Within collaborative creation, the needs of individuals must also be taken into account. Hopkins (2015) recommended that differentiating instruction based on individual needs is integral within the structure of collaborative composition. Mr. Porter offered individual feedback to students in small group lessons, and he based the type and depth of feedback based on the student’s progress and individual personality. As an example, during an individual lesson with an eighth grade euphonium player, Mr. Porter allowed the student to work through revisions of his composition at his own pace and provided limited guidance because he did not want the student to become overwhelmed with too much feedback and turn the lesson into a negative musical experience. Similarly, Mr. Stevens provided guidance to small groups of students to show them that there are a variety of options to choose from when composing, and that there is no one right way. The guidance was dependent on the particular combination of students and the musical material they were contributing. Mr. Vance also provided brief but meaningful feedback to
students during the full ensemble collaborative composition sessions which served to keep students’ attention on the task at hand as well as reinforce appropriate collaboration among students. In each context the students collaboratively created their compositions, all while their peers influenced the revision process and their teachers aimed to provide meaningful and individual feedback. This, in turn, appeared to promote the level of student ownership over their compositions.

Encouraging Student Participation

Regardless of context, each teacher participant demonstrated the importance of encouraging every student to participate in the composition process fully. Rusinek (2007) found that students preferred to collaborate with peers rather than composing individually because, in part, of the sense of shared responsibility. That notion rang true for the students at Skylerville Academy as they collaborated in small groups on their compositions. The particular roles that some eighth grade student groups created for their members as described above (sound effects and melodic material) demonstrated the shared responsibility of collaborative creation, which encouraged full student participation.

Phillips (2017) noted the importance of allowing students’ lived experiences to enter the classroom during creative musical activities. To this point, Mr. Stevens structured the eighth grade video game soundtrack activity to promote students’ lived experiences as an integral part in the creation of these soundtracks. The students’ knowledge and experience with specific video games, as well as their musical preferences, intersected with their musical understanding of compositional processes and forged novel collaborative compositions. Similarly, Mr. Vance had previously implemented creative musical activities utilizing technology (specifically DAWs to manipulate found sounds) which focused on highlighting the lived experiences of the high school
band students through everyday sounds of their lives, and their imagination and curiosities to manipulate these sounds into a composition.

Weidner (2020) recommended the inclusion of student-led music-making experiences to foster student agency and to frame instruction with divergent questions to approach decision making processes. Mr. Porter was particularly adept at asking divergent questions and guiding students toward making musical decisions with their own creative work. Mr. Stevens allowed his students to break up into student-led small groups to collaboratively create their compositions, and offered guidance sprinkled with divergent questions when the students were in need. Mr. Vance heavily promoted student-led musical experiences in the high school band rehearsal setting, including students individually creating riffs, and working as an ensemble to collaboratively create the final version of the composition with limited teacher guidance.

Lage-Gómez and Cremadas-Andreu (2020) found that “participatory creativity” with a music classroom of a Spanish secondary school involved decision-making, shared goals among the group of student composers, and participation through enculturation, which involves students focusing their initial creative efforts within the musical worlds of their background culture. These first two elements are similar to the notions of divergent questioning and shared responsibility described above. The third element of participation through enculturation was something that each teacher participant described as being an important consideration for musical creativity among secondary music students. However, the eighth grade students at Skylerville Academy were among the only students that I observed explicitly basing their compositions and creative musical decisions from their lived cultural experiences. Some students went so far as to select videos outside of those offered by Mr. Stevens, instead selecting videos that held more relevance to their lives. This reliance on the artistic worlds of one’s own cultural background can significantly impact the creative process, if parameters are put in place which
allow this creative enculturation to occur. The affordance of creative collaboration, the promotion of lived experiences, the inclusion of student-led musical experiences, and the phenomenon of creative enculturation all play a role in fostering full student participation in the creative process.

**Approaching Composition as Transfer of Musical Understanding**

While the range of specific goals for each teacher participant varied, there was one constant: the use of composition activities to promote the transfer of students’ musical understanding. Every band program held an underlying philosophy that the musical experiences occurring within the band room must hold significance in students’ lives outside of the band room, and this held particularly true during the composition activities. By focusing students’ energy toward specific musical problems to solve through composition, each teacher participant was helping their students to gain meaningful musical experiences that have the potential to maintain relevance in other musical contexts.

Phillips (2017) stated the importance of students developing an ownership over the creative musical process, while Weidner (2020) promoted the development of student agency to develop lifelong musicianship. These threads of creative ownership and lifelong musicianship help to highlight the importance of high quality creative musical activities. Mr. Porter utilized divergent questions to encourage his students to make meaningful and logical musical decisions with their compositions, and to think beyond the nuts and bolts of notes and rhythms but to arrive at an expressive interpretation of their own work. Mr. Stevens explicitly pointed out compositional devices utilized by wind band composers in hopes of this knowledge transferring to other band works, and eventually the students’ own compositions. Similarly, Mr. Vance made the most out of opportunities to point out compositional devices. He would also allow students the time and space to play around with these musical devices through improvisation and
composition activities. Each teacher participant structured their composition activities to allow for deeper musical understanding and promote the transfer of this understanding to various musical contexts within and outside of the band room.

Summary of Instructional Strategies

The instructional strategies employed by the teacher participants of this study were varied, from divergent questioning to allowing for student choice. While the specific contexts of each case are unique, the overarching instructional methods share commonalities. To varying extents, each teacher participant encouraged student collaboration during the process of creating their compositions. For Mr. Porter, collaboration involved students playing their compositions simultaneously, while for Mr. Vance the students were engaged in the processes of creation and revision as a full group. Each teacher also encouraged full student participation during the composition activities, and this was achieved through maintaining relevance in students’ lives outside of school, promoting shared responsibility during the creative process, and allowing for student-led musical experiences. The end goal of student musical understanding that can be transferred between musical contexts was also shared among the teacher participants, and this was approached through the particular contexts of each site’s composition activities to promote ownership and lifelong musicianship. In the following section, I will explore the particular instructional materials utilized by the teacher participants and the impact these materials made on the composition process.

Instructional Materials

In this section, I will explore the instructional materials utilized by each teacher participant in this study. This will be presented through data from interviews with teacher participants, focus group interviews with student participants, my reflections on the data from observing the composition activities, as well as my analysis of artifacts gathered from each site.
Following the presentation of findings from each case, I will examine relevant scholarship in relation to two key elements of instructional materials for composition activities: the use of harmonic structures as the basis of compositions, and the role of musical notation during composition activities. Intersections of scholarship and the findings presented here will help to provide an in-depth view of instructional materials utilized within composition activities.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

The composition activity for the eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School began with an improvisation exercise based on the improvisatory section of the teacher’s band composition, *Adventure Road*. Within the students’ individual parts, the specific harmonic progression was clearly laid out, with the chord tones of each harmony printed as half notes. This visual representation of the harmonic progression served as the basis for the improvisation exercise, which progressed in a very sequential manner.

The sequence of the improvisation exercise was based on the “Seven Skills” within the book *Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation* (Azzara & Grunow, 2010). The “Seven Skills” are listed below:

1. Improvise rhythms on chord roots.
2. Perform essential voice leading for repertoire by ear.
3. Learn harmonic rhythm using the pitches from Skill 2.
4. Improvise rhythm patterns to the harmonic progression using the pitches from Skill 2.
5. Improvise tonal patterns outlining the harmonic progression of the tune.
6. Combine tonal and rhythm patterns and improvise a melody.
7. Decorate and embellish the melodic material from Skill 6 and improvise a melody. (Azzara & Grunow, 2010)
Mr. Porter described how the students had previously experienced these sequential steps while improvising over the chord changes to “When the Saints Go Marching In” earlier in the school year. Now, the students were basing their improvisations off of the harmonic progression within the improvisatory section of *Adventure Road*, and Mr. Porter led them through the Seven Skills within the span of one twenty minute full band rehearsal. The students first played the bass line of the harmonic progression on the chord roots, then played other chord tones at the appropriate times throughout the harmonic progression. Next, the students were encouraged to embellish their improvisations. Mr. Porter allowed time for the students to revise their embellished improvisations and notate their favorite musical ideas over the specific harmonic changes using a separate sheet of staff paper. The students worked this way, first improvising over a specific set of measures, then notating their favorite melodic ideas, until the entire 16-measure improvisatory section was complete.

The process of notating their favorite musical ideas using traditional musical notation proved to be difficult for some students. Following the process of improvisation to composition in the full band setting, Mr. Porter worked with students on their composition progress during their subsequent small group lessons. He would first have students play through their compositions, simultaneously with the rest of the students in the lesson group, while he accompanied them on piano playing the harmonic progression. Next, he would examine the students’ work on their staff paper and assist the students in revising their written notation to match what they were actually playing. Students often wrote inaccurate rhythms, or incomplete measures, and Mr. Porter would assist them in revising their notation through repeated playing of their composition until what they played matched what was on the page.

During the follow-up interview with Mr. Porter four months after the initial composition activity, he stated that the final concert performance of *Adventure Road* featured three student
soloists who were instructed to improvise over the harmonic progression in the improvisatory section of the piece. These students volunteered to perform improvisations in the concert performance, and they were provided with opportunities to practice their improvisations in the full band rehearsals in the weeks leading up to the concert performance. Mr. Porter noted that some of the students were still utilizing notation during their improvisations, and this was done to varying degrees. One student performed the same “improvised” solo verbatim each and every time they were given the opportunity, which made it clear that they were instead reading their written composition that fit over the harmonic progression of the improvisatory section. Another student had written down a few short melodic ideas on their composition sheet, as a sort of idea journal to be used during their improvisations. This student would begin phrases of their improvisation with these short ideas similarly each time they improvised, but would alter the latter half of the musical phrase, signaling that they were utilizing both their written compositional ideas and in-the-moment improvisation.

Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy

For the eighth grade band students of Skylerville Academy, one of the instructional materials that they utilized were video recordings from live gameplay of various video games which they selected to base their compositions on. During the eighth grade band student focus group interview, Layla said that her group’s process of selecting the video and the subsequent compositional ideas were based on their knowledge of the particular video game and the extramusical elements that they experienced as part of the video game. “The mood of the video game, it’s another reason why you need to know the video games. You don’t really know unless you play it.” Knowledge of the “mood” of each video game was crucial because Mr. Stevens provided students with a worksheet including guided questions that helped to frame their compositions (see Appendix F). Questions such as, “What is the mood of the video game? List at
least 3 adjectives to describe it,” and “Write a short story about the character and their actions in
the video game” provided a type of advanced organizer for the students to express the essential
elements of the video game through the music that they composed. After selecting a video, the
eighth grade band students collaborated within their small groups to answer the questions on the
worksheet prior to exploring sounds to include in their compositions.

Similarly, the seventh grade band students were provided with a worksheet to complete
prior to the start of their compositional process (see Appendix G). The worksheet included
questions such as, “How long do you want each sound to last?” and “What will each sound look
like on the graph?” to help students approach the composition of their sounds (“Whoosh,”
“Ding,” and “Boom”) in a thoughtful and meaningful way. There were also questions related to
how the students will approach conducting their compositions, including, “What gestures should
you use?” and “How can you vary your gestures to make different sounds?” These guiding
questions provided a structure for which the seventh grade band students could base their sound
compositions. Mr. Stevens would often refer back to the questions on the worksheets for each
composition activity while providing feedback to students.

At the start of each rehearsal with the eighth grade band, Mr. Stevens led the students
through a warm-up that consisted of a focus on harmonic progressions, including I, IV, V7, and
vi in major tonality. These harmonies were visually represented on the screen in the front of the
band room. Mr. Stevens stated, “Even if we weren’t doing a composition project, maybe two to
three times each week we would do chord warm-ups.” While the specific structure of each chord
warm-up activity would change, the versions that I observed included the students self-selecting
a note within each chord, and Mr. Stevens visually cueing students to change between chords
with the goal of quality tone production and listening across the ensemble to focus on intonation.
The video game soundtrack activity did not involve the specific parameter of composing within a
chord progression, but Mr. Stevens encouraged his students to outline these harmonies as a starting point for their compositions.

One interesting aspect of the Skylerville Academy site was that while the students were working on their compositions, the seventh and eighth grade bands were also spending a portion of rehearsal time a concert band piece written by a ninth grade student who had recently graduated from Skylerville Academy. When I asked Xander, an eighth grade flute player, how he felt about playing a band piece by a recent alum, he said, “Yea, I actually know him. So it’s cool to play a piece by him. He’s a kid just like us, right?” The piece was in 7/8 time since it was written specifically for the seventh and eighth grade bands at Skylerville Academy to be performed on their spring concert. Apart from helping to motivate the current seventh and eighth grade band students in composing, the piece was also a testament for how deeply and consistently Mr. Stevens focused on creative musical activities and the creative confidence he inspired in his band students.

When asked about the role of notation, Mr. Stevens described it as essential for the reproduction or recreation of a musical idea. He believed that the main goal of notation was to help someone else perform your musical ideas. The specific use of notation within composition depends on the project, as evidenced by the two different projects that the seventh and eighth grade band students were engaged with. The seventh grade band students utilized representative, or graphic, notation for their sound compositions, using a series of individually created and self-selected symbols for each sound effect. These symbols were placed on a graph with the x-axis serving as time or duration, and the y-axis serving as volume or dynamic. The eighth grade band students were instructed to write down their melodic ideas using traditional music notation, and that what they wrote was supposed to match what they performed. Mr. Stevens provided the following example concerning which type of notation to use in composition activities: “When
working within the genre of Western art music, it would be appropriate to utilize formal notation. Similar to an art teacher utilizing appropriate techniques, like shading, or the use of a specific color palette, based on the style of art.” According to Mr. Stevens, the use of notation is context-dependent.

**Mr. Vance – Effington High School**

Mr. Vance utilized a visual representation of harmonic progression, especially during the warm-up process of band rehearsals. During the Concert Band focus group interview, I asked the students why they believe Mr. Vance utilizes the visual representation of harmonic structures during the warm-up. Jamie, a trombonist, answered, “It’s able to help us see the chords and help students improvise together.” Mr. Vance confirmed that it is a visual aid for students to use during improvisation.

While there was no requirement for the use of notation within the riff building activity, I noticed a particularly illuminating moment while observing concert band rehearsal. During the riff building activity, one particular group of students found it difficult to remember their riff between the initial creation and selection of the riff to performing the riffs altogether with the other ensemble sections’ riffs. The difficulty of recalling musical ideas can become an issue if there is no explicit parameter of using any form of musical notation. When asked about the role of notation, Mr. Vance said,

The role of notation is to give direction at different levels of specificity as to what you want something to sound like, from a creator to someone else who is trying to recreate or put their spin on it. Notation serves as a way to communicate intent. (Interview, May 17th, 2022)

The specific “intent” that Mr. Vance referred to includes expressive intent. I asked him if he believed that the expressive intent is final when the composition is completed, and Mr. Vance
said, “There are still decisions to be made. There are still interpretations, still room for flexibility.” Mr. Vance’s view of notation as a way to communicate intent allows the opportunity for the negotiation of expression between composer and performer.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

The findings reported above showcase the varied approaches of the composition activities designed within each case. While these approaches differ, there are overarching throughlines that illuminate two important elements of utilizing instructional materials for composition activities: a focus on harmony, and the role of musical notation. Each of these elements will be described in this section through examining relevant scholarship involving the use of harmonic structures as a basis of composition and considerations concerning the use of musical notation during composition activities. I will present this scholarship in conjunction with the findings reported above to provide a complete view of these elements and what they mean for the use of instructional materials in composition activities.

**Focus on Harmony**

According to Azzara and Grunow (2010), musical improvisation must be meaningful. The goal of the “Seven Steps” of learning improvisation is to internalize all seven steps, particularly harmony and identifying harmonic progressions by ear.

In this book, you are asked to listen to music and sing and play melodies and bass lines by ear. The objective is not to memorize the tunes. After all, you didn’t memorize your speech as a child. Rather, the objective is to internalize so many melodies and bass lines that you begin to hear harmonic progressions (the changes, or patterns in music) and generate your own melodic lines. (Azzara & Grunow, 2010, p. iv)

This particular book was specific to Mr. Porter’s use of improvisation as a precursor to composition. He utilized this book prior to the composition activity that I observed, including a
sequential progression of improvising over the harmonic changes to “When the Saints Go
Marching In,” which served as a helpful experience in framing the compositional process of the
current activity.

Mr. Porter held a fairly strict view that students’ improvisations, and their resultant
compositions, must be created within a specific harmonic progression, and a particular key and
meter. Mr. Stevens, on the other hand, did not have nearly as strict of a focus on the importance
of harmonic progressions. While he implemented warm-up activities based on common
harmonic progressions using the I, IV, V7, and vi chords in major tonality, the eighth grade band
students’ video game soundtrack compositions were not supposed to be explicitly based on any
particular harmonic progression. Mr. Vance adhered to the functions of harmony within
improvisation and, as a result, composition. He set up the riff building activity within a particular
key and meter, and instructed students to play a specific chord tone of the I chord in major
tonality. Mr. Vance could be considered more lenient in terms of the importance of harmonic
structure to improvisation and composition as compared with Mr. Porter, but stricter as
compared with Mr. Stevens.

In her dissertation on a “colour-first compositional approach,” Blackshaw (2020)
presented her approach to composition (see Figure 6). A prolific and renowned composer of
wind band works herself, Blackshaw’s approach is based on Graf’s (2013) description of the
compositional approaches of the well-known composers of the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries. Her approach consists of four stages: the “productive mood,” involves
finding inspiration for the compositional work; the “musical conception” where initial pitch and
harmonic material are produced; “sketching,” which involves improvising and refining melodic
ideas; and “composing” where the specific scoring of full instrumentation takes place.
Specifically concerning harmonic structure, Blackshaw described her process as involving extramusical factors.

When it comes to harmonic language and the selection of key, there are a number of different influences that guide harmonic selection for a particular work. The mood and purpose of the work have the greatest impact on harmonic selection, and it is here that the years spent learning the Organ have their greatest impact. … At times, I play around with single melodic ideas. Other times, melodies are punctuated with harmonies; i.e. the melody is harmonised, or a chord progression is added to a melodic line. (Blackshaw, 2020, p. 80)

This approach is similar to how Mr. Stevens encouraged his eighth grade band students to explore the extramusical factors of the video game, and how they might influence the harmonic and melodic structures of their collaborative compositions.

Figure 6

*Compositional Process of Blackshaw (2020, p. 73).*
Role of Notation

The role of notation was a topic of discussion with each teacher participant in this study. While the specific use of notation varied within each case, authors have advocated for the use of alternative notation as a means of entry into the compositional process. Hickey (2012) suggested that teachers should implement composition activities regardless of their students’ abilities to notate music with traditional notation, instead focusing on where the students are with their abilities and utilizing sketches or other forms of non-traditional notation. Mr. Porter focused his students’ efforts on traditional, formal musical notation, and assisted them when they were having difficulty navigating the specificity needed for formal notation. Mr. Stevens was more lenient on the specific notation used and believed that it should be context-dependent. Thornton (2013) described the notion of an idea journal for musical ideas, which is designed to provide a space for students to write down short fragments of musical ideas that they can return back to and use as the basis for improvisations or compositions. One student who improvised on the concert performance of *Adventure Road*, according to Mr. Porter, utilized a type of musical idea journal by sketched the initial musical ideas for the start of each improvised phrase.

Another well-known wind band composer, Shapiro (2013) stated what she believed to be the common issue with traditional notation:

Traditional notation can present an immediate conflict between the creative and logical brain hemispheres: the moment we compose a right-brain artistic gesture, we’re expected to solve a left-brain math problem in order to notate it! This can slow any composer down and temporarily squelch an inspired moment. (Shapiro, 2013, p. 113)

Similar to Hickey’s (2012) suggestion of allowing multiple forms of musical notation for compositions, Shapiro advocated for the use of alternative notation, including graphic notation. An example of this would be the seventh grade sound compositions from Skylerville Academy.
where Mr. Stevens instructed his students to draw their compositions using symbols on a graph. Shapiro would encourage this type of notation, saying “instead of putting little black dots and bar lines in very specific places to represent unspecific, amorphous sounds and textures floating around in our heads, we can draw what the music looks and feels like” (Shapiro, 2013, p. 113).

Mr. Porter, Mr. Stevens, and Mr. Vance all believed that notation is needed to simply play back what has been created. According to scholarship related to the use of notation in composition activities, traditional Western musical notation should only occur when the ability to create and decode this form of notation is an explicit goal. This is similar to Mr. Stevens’s notion that traditional notation should be utilized if we are creating music in a Western classical style that relies on traditional Western notation.

Summary of Instructional Materials

There are a wide variety of approaches to musical composition, and each is dependent on the specific musical context. Mr. Porter focused the eighth grade students’ compositions toward the particular harmonic progression of *Adventure Road* and required his students to write their compositions using traditional musical notation. While Mr. Stevens would explore typical harmonic progressions with his eighth grade band students during their warm-up process, he did not require a particular harmonic structure for their compositions that accompanied the video games. However, he did require them to use traditional notation in writing their compositions collaboratively. His seventh grade students, on the other hand, were allowed to compose using graphic notation and, since the sound compositions were based only on sound effects ("Whoosh," "Ding," and "Boom"), there was no requirement for any sort of harmonic structure. Mr. Vance put forth a clear metric and harmonic structure for his high school band students to create their individual riffs, but he did not require the use of notation as part of the activity as it was brief and based purely on short melodic improvisations.
Relevant scholarship revealed that approaches to composing are similarly varied as the cases in this study would suggest. While some scholars believe that musical compositions must be sequentially built from clear harmonic structures (e.g., Azzara & Grunow, 2010), others take a more holistic and potentially programmatic path toward initial sound conception (e.g., Blackshaw, 2020). Concerning the use of notation, some scholars feel it is best to allow students alternative ways to notate their creative musical ideas (e.g., Hickey, 2012), such as utilizing graphic notation (Shapiro, 2013) or musical idea journals (Thornton, 2013). Regardless of the specific musical context of a composition activity, the simple act of meeting students where they are in terms of their musical understanding and ability to read and write with traditional notation is paramount.

Assessing Composition Activities

There are many considerations concerning the assessment of creative musical activities in general, and composition activities in particular. In this section, I will present findings from each case relating to the teacher action of assessing composition activities. Following, I will examine relevant scholarship as it pertains to three specific considerations for the assessment of composition activities: social comparisons (Beghetto, 2005), scaffolded prerequisite experiences and clearly stated criteria (Leong et al., 2012), and the notion of consensual assessment for creative activities (Amabile, 1982). These threads will be drawn together to demonstrate the specific teacher actions of composition assessment within secondary instrumental music settings.

Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School

When asked how the eighth grade band would know when they have been successful with this particular composition activity, Mr. Porter stated that there is no specific box to check, and no clear end goal in mind. Instead, he viewed these composition activities as opportunities
for his students to develop deeper musical understanding and demonstrate growth through musical creation.

Since everyone can always be improving, I try to avoid concrete units. … They’re doing amazing things, let’s keep going. Let’s do more. Now what? Now where are we going? … There’s no end to education, and I carry that into my philosophy. (Interview, April 12th, 2022)

Mr. Porter avoided providing numerical assessment for students’ creative products. This was done especially when the students were new to musical creativity in band. He provided an example of why he should not use a rubric involving a five-point scale:

If they see a score of two or three out of five, they’re going to be like “Well, I suck.”

That’s not motivating, that doesn’t make them feel confident or successful. So I tend to avoid that until they have some more experience. (Interview, April 12th, 2022)

This approach to formative assessment with creative musical activities was in contrast to the summative assessment of standards-based grading Mr. Porter utilized for the eighth grade band students’ final grades for each semester. However, when it came to specific assignments within band, Mr. Porter said that he “doesn’t grade assignments,” instead offering specific feedback to promote growth in musicianship among students.

**Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy**

When asked how students are encouraged to revise their creative musical work, Mr. Stevens said that it depends on the goals of the project and the format of student participation (individual or in groups). During the revision stages of the activity, he often advocates for peer editing where students play their compositions for each other and receive feedback from their peers. During observations of both the seventh grade sound compositions and the eighth grade
video game soundtracks, I witnessed many instances of peer feedback within groups of students sharing their creative progress.

When it comes time for the final performance of student-created compositions, Mr. Stevens often utilizes rubrics with rating scales. These rubrics can be based on various aspects of the students’ compositions, including originality, effort, and musical syntax (e.g., the inclusion of a clef, key signature, and tempo within the composition). Mr. Stevens said that at times, students are able to notate melodic material that is more difficult than they are able to perform on their instrument, and the use of rubrics can help to align their musical ideas with their executive skills on their instruments. He believed that it was important to use rubrics so students were able to know when they had been successful with a particular creative project.

In the student focus group interviews, I asked students how they know if they did well with the composition activity. Amy, a seventh grade clarinet player, said that compliments from other students is a clear indication of success with a musical composition, and that confidence in performing the composition can help. “Usually when I’m working with groups, if I mess up, they don’t hear it, but I do. So a lot of my confidence comes from if they notice if I messed up.” Another seventh grade student, Jack, said, “What I feel ‘did well’ means is if I played what I wrote down, then I’m good. If I mess up something that I wrote down, then I didn’t do a good job.” In the eighth grade focus group interview, Tanya related sharing their musical compositions to the process of a “panel presentation” that occurs throughout various subjects at Skylerville Academy. These presentations are more of a celebration of individual thought and progress towards an educational goal rather than a final achievement of a specific goal, which promotes a growth mindset over a fixed mindset.

Mr. Vance – Effington High School
Similar to Mr. Porter and Mr. Stevens, Mr. Vance distinguished the type of assessments he employed for his students with composition activities. “If it’s a formal assessment, I give formal feedback in written form.” This formal feedback includes the use of a rubric with clear guidelines for the structure of the composition, including the use of chords, the length of the composition, and other musical elements. For a formal assessment, Mr. Vance would rely on the use of rubrics to convey the expectations of the activity. Conversely, when providing formative assessment part-way through the compositional process, he only provided verbal feedback. “The feedback that I give orally involves things like, ‘I like this,’ ‘Focus on this,’ ‘Try to include that,’ and that sort of thing.”

In the wind ensemble student focus group interview, I asked the students how they know if they have been successful with the composition activity. Vinny answered, “If he chooses it to be the main thing that we’ll keep repeating over and over again, that would definitely be one. That’s the main thing that would show success.” Chelsea provided an alternative perspective, stating, “I don’t think it’s really about success, it’s more about we’re learning more and more every time, it’s about musicianship.” When I asked what elements of musicianship the students learn through composition activities, Chelsea replied, “Beats, rhythm, and how different sounds blend together.” These student perspectives provide important insight into the perceived value that teachers can knowingly, or unknowingly, place on various aspects of composition activities.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

The findings presented above include specific assessment strategies and considerations from each case. When considering relevant scholarship in relation to these findings, three significant elements emerge: social comparisons during creative assessments, scaffolding experiences and clearly defined criteria for composition activities, and the notion of consensual assessment of creative activities. These three areas will be examined through the presentation of
relevant scholarship and how it intersects with the findings relating to the assessment of composition activities. The various perspectives will provide a holistic view of assessment specifically concerning composition activities within secondary instrumental settings.

**Social Comparisons**

Concerning the social nature of classrooms, Beghetto (2005) recommended limiting the amount of social comparisons among students and redirecting students’ focus toward the individual progress that they have made within the particular creative realm. “Assessments do not necessarily diminish or undermine student creativity; rather, how students perceive the goal messages sent by their teachers’ assessment practices is what matters” (Beghetto, 2005, p. 259). With the eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School, Mr. Porter limited social comparisons between students by providing individual feedback in small group settings, and structured full ensemble creative activities to include simultaneous improvisation with all students playing at once. Similarly, Mr. Stevens provided feedback to students in small group settings, and limited comparisons between peer groups during the final public performances of the final compositions. Tanya, an eighth grade band student, mentioned the “panel presentations” at Skylerville Academy as a way to share and celebrate progress rather than the achievement of a specific goal, similar to Beghetto’s (2005) notion of advocating for a growth mindset through creative activities.

Mr. Vance’s feedback within the particular riff building composition activity was often provided in the whole group setting. The closest feedback toward social comparisons observed at Effington High School was during concert band when the percussion section was rushing their four quarter note ostinato riff. However, Mr. Vance avoided explicit social comparisons by calling attention to the rift in pulse among the ensemble through the use of humor. Instead of admonishing the percussionists for rushing, he put the onus of listening to the percussion’s pulse
on the rest of the ensemble. This shift in focus of listening within the ensemble placed responsibility on the percussion section to maintain a steady pulse, and the rest of the ensemble to base their riffs off of this pulse. The informal performance of the final product in class mere minutes after the activity began also assisted with the low-stakes nature of the activity and avoided within group comparisons. In addition, Chelsea’s perspective of the composition activity as a means to develop individual musicianship showcases this particular student’s orientation of a growth mindset, which Beghetto (2005) would strongly encourage.

**Scaffolded Experiences and Clear Structure**

The way in which composition activities are foreshadowed can influence the quality of the experience and the resultant musical understandings. Leong et al. (2012) recommended that appropriate scaffolding and clearly stated criteria for expectations can help students succeed with creative musical assessments. Mr. Porter was methodical and purposeful with the way in which he scaffolded the prior creative experiences for his students in the academic year leading up to the composition activity. He offered clear guidelines to the students concerning the way in which they should approach improvisation, utilizing Azzara and Grunow’s (2010) Seven Steps, and the use of harmonic structures to craft their compositions.

Mr. Stevens provided scaffolding for his seventh grade band students prior to their engagement with the sound composition activity. He led the whole seventh grade band through shorter compositional experiences based on the sounds of a thunderstorm, using graphic notation and a select number of sound effects. These experiences provided students with multiple opportunities to craft dynamic and timbral shapes, which were directly transferable to the sound composition activity. The eighth grade band students were provided with a worksheet that guided students’ creative energies toward the extramusical elements present in the video games, and served as a starting point for planning their soundtrack compositions. As a formal assessment of
the video game soundtrack activity, Mr. Stevens used a rubric with clear numerical distinctions for the specific parameters of the composition, including a key signature, time signature, clef, and tempo marking. As Mr. Stevens stated, a final aspect of the formal assessment involved “If what they’re performing is actually in the piece that they wrote,” which distinguishes between planned and revised compositions and in-the-moment improvisations.

Mr. Vance would start nearly every band rehearsal with the improvisational warm-up activity called “anty-consy,” which involved a clear metric and harmonic structure and served as an immediate precursor to the riff building activity. Similarly, during the riff building activity, harmonic and metric structures were established, followed by clear criteria for students within various sections of the band to play specific chord tones. The length of riff creations was also precisely stated, and the collaboration component of learning other students’ riffs and fitting them together in the final performance promoted active listening. Nearly every aspect of the “anty-consy” and subsequent riff building activities were designed to build individual musicianship, and ensemble skills of active listening and responding expressively to visual cues from the student sound engineer.

**Consensual Assessment of Creativity in Practice**

Amabile (1982) developed the notion of consensual assessment for creative activities. She defined this type of assessment as follows:

A product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative. Appropriate observers are those familiar with the domain in which the product was created or the response articulated. Thus, creativity can be regarded as the quality of products or responses judged to be creative by appropriate observers, and it can also be regarded as the process by which something so judged is produced. (Amabile, 1982, p. 1001)
During an interview, Mr. Porter referenced Amabile’s (1982) notion of consensual assessment of creativity, which he defined in the statement, “If a bunch of people say it’s creative, then it’s creative.” Within the composition activity at Walberg Middle School, he relied on the students’ ever-growing musical understanding and his use of divergent questions to allow students to self-assess their own compositional products. Mr. Porter would ask questions such as, “Is this more of a melody, or a background?” and encourage students to consider elements that might make a musical idea more “melodic” or more “background.” He also avoided numerical assessments of students’ creative work, instead offering verbal feedback that provided the next steps for students along their compositional journey, with no clear end goal stated. His conception of musical creativity as being meaningful only if based within a harmonic structure also provided a foundation for his students to determine what is “creative” and what is not.

Mr. Stevens also referenced Amabile’s (1982) conception of creative assessment in interviews. His promotion of “peer editing” within small groups encouraged collaboration and group discussions of appropriate and relevant musical material that elicited expressive performances. The final performances of each group’s compositions were in class and in front of peers, offering peer observers the opportunity to consider other’s compositional products. With the eighth grade band students, Mr. Stevens utilized a numerical rubric that contained clearly defined criteria limited to essential musical elements of students’ compositions. Considered together, these elements allowed for consensual assessment of creative works, especially for the eighth grade band students. Conversely, with the riff building activity at Effington High School, all students in each ensemble were involved throughout the process, which provided very limited opportunities for students to truly “observe” the activity. As Mr. Vance was the only person able to remain as an observer, he offered his feedback to students on their creative products utilizing brief verbal feedback.
Summary of Assessment

Assessing creative musical activities, particularly musical compositions, can be a challenging endeavor. There are many social and musical aspects to consider, along with the hope that students will remain motivated to continue creating music beyond the current activity. Mr. Porter, Mr. Stevens, and Mr. Vance all distinguished between formative assessments and summative assessments of creative musical works, stating that formative assessments should involve direct, verbal feedback applicable to an individual student’s contribution or their musicianship. Summative assessments, conversely, should be based on a rubric with clear criteria and include only necessary parameters to foster success among students.

Limiting social comparisons (Beghetto, 2005) is of utmost importance when assessing students’ creative musical work, promoting a growth mindset of progress toward deeper musical understanding among students. The way in which composition activities are introduced, including prior creative musical activities and the specific expectations of the composition activity, is also integral to the success of the activity. Appropriate scaffolding and clear criteria will help students to find creative success (Leong et al., 2012). Allowing observers the opportunity to collectively determine what is appropriately creative or not is a form of consensual assessment of creative activities (Amabile, 1982). The particular composition activities within each case met the consensual assessment criteria to varying degrees, but the holistic notion of consensual assessment is an important consideration in designing composition activities.

Summary of Teacher Action and Pedagogy of Composition Activities

This chapter presented elements of the pedagogy of composition activities specifically relating to the notion of teacher action. The ways in which the teacher participants for this study enacted their philosophical perspectives through the instructional strategies, the instructional
materials, and the specific assessment techniques of their composition activities were presented. Within each thread of teacher action, relevant scholarship was also examined, particularly relating to considerations for secondary instrumental music education.

The instructional strategies employed by the teacher participants, while varied, all involved encouraging collaboration through creation, eliciting full student participation, and the transfer of musical understanding to various musical contexts. The instructional materials were similarly varied, with some cases involving significantly structured activities with the use of instructional resources (e.g., Walberg Middle School), while others involved in-the-moment experiences that were revised to create an informal performance product (e.g., Effington High School). Relating to instructional materials were considerations involving the specific focus on harmony and the use of graphic or formal musical notation. The assessment strategies of each teacher participant involved a mixture of formative and summative assessments, and included avoiding social comparisons, scaffolded prerequisite experiences and clearly stated criteria for assessment, and the notion of consensual assessment for creative activities. From these presentations of findings and discussions of relevant scholarship, a more complete understanding of the various types of teacher action and the considerations specifically of composition activities within secondary instrumental music settings is offered.
Chapter V

Teacher Thought and the Pedagogy of Composition Activities

Framed by the actions of teacher participants regarding the pedagogy of composition activities as presented in the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on the specific philosophical and contextual considerations that influence each teacher’s actions. These philosophical considerations include the contexts and definitions of composition, the goals of composition activities, the precursors to composition activities, and the benefits and challenges of including composition activities within secondary instrumental music curricula. Within each section, I will report findings from each teacher participant and, when appropriate, findings from student focus group interviews, observations, and artifacts that highlight elements of the philosophical and contextual considerations of the teacher participants. At the end of each section, I will examine relevant scholarship and how it intersects with the findings from this study. The aim of this chapter is to provide promising practices of instrumental music educators who wish to provide holistic instruction through the inclusion of creative musical activities for their students.

Contexts and Definitions of Composition

As stated in Chapter I, for this study, composition will refer to creative musical activities in which students are tasked with creating an original and reproducible piece of music. This definition of composition holds true within the context of each case in this study. The specific length, structure, and product of composition differed between cases, ranging from formally...
notated melodies in Walberg Middle School to a combination of individually created riffs in Effington High School.

In this section, I will examine the varied philosophical and contextual approaches to composition of each teacher participant as well as related scholarship on approaches to composition activities. Through presenting the varied approaches to composition within and between each case, and how they relate to relevant scholarship on composition activities, I hope to offer a more complete picture of how instrumental music teachers can frame composition activities.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

Mr. Porter was an especially knowledgeable “key informant” as he was completing his own dissertation study on creative musical activities in instrumental music, which allowed for a rich conversation regarding the definition of composition. He believed the purpose of the composition activity was to assess students’ understanding of musical structures, including melody and harmony (utilizing chord tones when composing a melody), as well as rhythm and meter (creating melodic material that is clearly within the specified meter and utilizes appropriate rhythms).

For Mr. Porter, the question of whether an activity in the band classroom can be considered “composition” or “arranging” depends on to what extent teachers (and students) utilize preexisting musical structures, how much is retained, and what is significantly changed. When asked if improvisation should be a precursor to composition, he replied “Through my dissertation, I’m understanding that it’s on a spectrum” from in the moment to slowly developed over time. He stated, “Improvisation is temporal, it’s in the moment” and that “anything that is created must be created in the moment.” He believes improvisation is an organic and necessary precursor to composition, and he credits the dissertation by Stoltzfuhs (2005) as being a
significant piece of empirical literature that illuminated the importance of improvisation before composition.

Mr. Porter referenced two specific examples of “pseudo-composition” in music learning contexts. The first referred to the composition activities in the *Essential Elements 2000* (Lautzenheiser et al., 1999) method book where students are given a nearly completed melody and have the freedom to decide how to fill a single missing beat with pitches and rhythms as a sort of fill-in-the-blank type of creative exercise. This, according to Mr. Porter, was not a worthwhile creative endeavor because it did not assess the musical knowledge of the students in an authentic way. The second example was his son’s second grade music class, where students were given a type of word bank with notes and rhythms and students were expected to “compose” by matching up note names to individual rhythms. Both of these examples did not allow the students to manipulate sound in a meaningful way to arrive at a satisfying and complete aural image prior to notating the work. Instead, each were “paint by numbers” approaches that were based on visual instead of aural cues. “I believe there has to be improvisation,” said Mr. Porter.

**Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy**

The eighth grade band students at Skylerville Academy participated in a video game composition activity where they worked in small groups to match up a short (one- to two-minute) video clip of gameplay of a video game with an original composition that they created. In the focus group interview with four eighth grade band students, we had a brief discussion about how composition can be defined. Xander said,

> It’s planned, you’ve written some stuff before and you base it from that. Improvisation, you just think of something and you try to play it. I think that’s part of composition,
because you’re supposed to play it before you write it down. When you’re writing music you have more time to think and plan it out.

For Xander, improvisation is a necessary precursor to composition, and the rest of the students in the focus group interview agreed. They went on to describe how they begin the composition process, and all of the focus group interview participants said that they rely on musical styles and sounds that they already know and have been exposed to. Tanya said, “It comes from our musical world and what we’ve heard before.”

Mr. Stevens is also an instrumental music educator knowledgeable about musical creativity research. When asked if it is difficult to stay knowledgeable about many different musical styles that his students might be interested in, he replied, “Yes, but that’s part of my job as an educator. To know different styles and to know what students are into musically, and a basic understanding of chord structure and improvisation.” He believed that in order to arrive at a musically appropriate product, you must begin with improvisation. This point was made clear by the fact that one of his students, Xander, had explained that “you’re supposed to play it before you write it down.” Mr. Stevens went on to say, “I don’t think it’s anything beyond what we already do everyday. I think it’s just a different subset of skills.”

Mr. Vance – Effington High School

Mr. Vance held a less rigid approach to the creative musical activities in his band classroom, and he consistently directed every question toward the larger picture of long-term musical understanding, appreciation, and skill development with his students. When asked about the difference between improvisation and composition, he replied that composition is being able to teach a musical idea to someone else and them being able to reproduce that musical idea easily. “The eventual goal is for students to have the executive skills to have an idea in their ears, then notate it out in some way.” By “executive skills” Mr. Vance referred to the instrument-
specific skills needed to play the instrument. He described improvisation as “noodle time within a given key and meter” which, he believed, should absolutely serve as a precursor to composition.

The riff building activities that Mr. Vance led were heavily reliant on student improvisation through a call and response format, first with the teacher then with fellow students. This format lent itself easily to including various dynamic shapes and musical inflections. This expressive capacity within the short improvisations led Mr. Vance to describe these improvisations as “personal expressions of the performer.” He referenced a discussion he had with the jazz saxophonist Diego Rivera in which Rivera defined improvisation. Paraphrasing Rivera’s words, Mr. Vance said, “We have one central idea, and everyone has their own thing to say on that idea. That’s improvisation.”

The level of personal expression allowed through composition activities is equally as impactful, according to Mr. Vance. In the ukulele and songwriting course that he also teaches, Mr. Vance described a coaching session with a student who was working on a song with a lyric that ended with a downward emotional trajectory. He recommended that the melody mimic that downward trajectory, and the student was able to perform it with a much deeper level of expression. This process of revision helps students to align their emotional intent with the execution of expressive performance.

**Intersections with Scholarship**

In the field of music education, definitions of composition can be varied and broad. The three teacher participants in this study presented three theoretical perspectives in defining composition in the secondary band context. In this section, I will present intersections with relevant scholarship, including Webster’s (1990/2002) “Creative Thinking in Music” model,

Webster’s (1990, 2002) “Creative Thinking in Music”

Many scholars have offered definitions of the composition process, including Webster (1990, 2002), Fautley (2005), and Thornton (2013). In Webster’s (1990) model of creative thinking in music, he labeled composition as one of three categories that served as both product intentions as well as creative products (the others being improvisation and analysis). According to Webster (1990),

Is creativity product, or process, or both? Should it be considered primarily as something that takes place in composition? Can it be readily measured? Does it have anything to do with musical aptitude? Isn’t it the same as intelligence? Isn’t it really only a “general music” activity? Can it be taught? (p. 22).

These questions pointed out the lack of consensus around the topic of creativity within music education at the time. This confusion led Webster (1990) to posit the term “creative thinking” within music education, since this “place[s] the emphasis on the process itself and on its role in music teaching and learning” (p. 22).

Just over a decade later, Webster (2002) updated his model of creative thinking in music to include a total of five product intentions (compose, perform music of others, listen repeatedly, listen once, and improvise) as well as five creative products (composed music scores/recordings, recorded performances, written analysis, mental representations of the music heard, and recorded improvisations). The model also expanded the notion of enabling conditions to include social and cultural elements of context, task, peer influence, and past experience. The expansion of the model and inclusion of more products and conditions signaled a more holistic view of creative thinking in music. Webster’s emphasis on the multiple modes of creativity made clear that the
creative process can become focused on more than one creative product, such as the creation of a composition and the subsequent analysis and performance of the composition with expressivity.

Mr. Porter’s composition activity with the eighth grade students of Walberg Middle School emphasized a reliance on enabling skills, especially the students’ understanding of harmony. The musical skills of listening, identifying harmonic progressions and chord tones, and improvising melodic material over harmonic progressions were developed over the course of the school year, and the composition activity built on these enabling skills.

The video game soundtrack activity by Mr. Stevens at Skylerville Academy was based firmly in the students’ prior musical, social, and cultural knowledge and experiences. The eighth grade students were only able to be successful in the composition activity if they were simultaneously familiar with the video game depicted in the video, the musical elements needed to express the intended social and cultural messages from the video, and the executive skills needed to perform their instruments in a stylistically and musically appropriate manner to line up with the video.

Mr. Vance’s riff building activity at Effington High School lent itself to the duality of composition and expressive performance. By describing the improvisational process as the “personal expressions of the performer,” Mr. Vance made clear the value placed on individuality and communication of extramusical elements with musical structures through the creative process. The enabling conditions of the social and cultural context were also at play as students were listening to, responding to, and elaborating on their peers’ riffs.

**Fautley’s (2005) Model of Group Composing**

Fautley studied lower secondary school students in England during a group composing activity. In describing the location of components of composing, he separated out those that belonged to the individual, those taking place in a shared setting, and those that may occur
through distribution between individuals (see Figure 3 in Chapter II). These distinctions allowed for particular aspects of group composition activities to be specifically located with either the individual, the group, or distributed among individuals within the group.

The composing activity by Mr. Porter allowed the students opportunities to experience each of the locations as described by Fautley (2005). The students first individually improvised and, after the process of revision, composed their original melodies over the same harmonic progression. This trial-and-error process involved playing their individual improvisations in an ensemble setting, simultaneously with others playing their own improvisations, and selecting their favorite musical ideas to write down as their composition. Later, Mr. Porter worked with students individually and in small group settings during their lessons to hear each student perform their composition and provide feedback for revision. The composition activity at Walberg Middle School aligned closely with the “Transformations, extensions, and development” level of Fautley’s (2005) description in the figure, as there were individual opportunities for trialing, selecting and rejecting, as well as opportunities for these elements to be discussed and found through exploration.

Mr. Stevens designed the eighth grade composition activity at Skylerville Academy to be a marriage of aural creativity and visual cue. The students worked together in small groups to depict their chosen video through sound, some offering originally composed melodic material, and others creating sound effects through their instruments. Similar to Fautley’s (2005) notion of “Thematic material,” the creation of an aural theme was central to this composition activity through individual group members’ personal experiences with the video games, the combined “fitting together” of their resources, and the resultant composition crafted and performed by every member of the group.
The riff building activity designed by Mr. Vance at Effington High School allowed students to manipulate individuals’ musical ideas, combining riffs into a collaborative composition, and subsequently having a single student lead the ensemble in performance while offering an expressive interpretation through the use of an imaginary “sound board.” The riff building activity is similar to the “Idea” category of Fautley’s (2005) description of locations.

**Improvisation as a Precursor to Composition**

Musical composition can be approached from many angles. Some approaches rely heavily on sight alone, dealing solely with notation. Others focus on the manipulation of sound first, followed by revision, and arriving at notation as a way of remembering for later recall. Aligning with the latter approach, Thornton (2013) posited that improvisation can offer an excellent inroad to composing activities as the focus is on the aural musical structures themselves. Essential for a successful introductory improvisational experience for students is a safe environment, which involves the teacher (and fellow students) offering statements void of judgement, addressing the role of mistakes as “happy accidents” (p. 17), and encouraging student participation through performing in a variety of social settings (i.e., an entire ensemble, a small group of friends, or only the teacher). Further discussion of the role of classroom environment on creative musical activities will be discussed in Chapter VII.

Another essential aspect of improvisation is listening, and Thornton offered multiple ways to approach listening. “Improvisers can listen with different ears. Within improvisation, listening for imitation is one type of listening, listening for execution is another. Since improvisation exists without notation, listening becomes the vehicle for sharing ideas (in the place of notation)” (Thornton, 2013, pp. 18-19). Through offering a variety of listening and improvisational activities structured as games, Thornton posited that improvisation can offer a genuine avenue for personal expression.
Regardless of context, in each case, the teacher participants utilized the process of improvisation as a direct precursor to their composition activities. Mr. Porter began the composition activity by allowing the eighth grade band students of Walberg Middle School to improvise over a specified harmonic progression multiple times, sequentially moving away from printed notation of the bass line and chords and toward original melodic material. Mr. Stevens offered a broader entrance into improvisation with the eighth grade band students of Skylerville Academy by only stipulating that their creations must align with the video that they chose. Mr. Vance encouraged the Effington High School band students to individually express themselves through their individual riff improvisations, which allowed for their collaborative composition to become more representative of the students in the room. While the context of the composition activities varied, the reliance on improvisation as the catalyst of creative musical thought was present in each case.

**Summary of Contexts and Definitions of Composition**

The specific approaches to composition activities by each teacher participant varied, from the focus on a harmonic progression in Mr. Porter’s class to the open-ended creation of a soundtrack in Mr. Steven’s class. Each teacher participant’s description of composition also varied, including how it varied from other types of creative musical activities. However, each case presented a combination of enabling skills and conditions (Webster, 1990, 2002) ranging from understandings of musical structures to the influence of peers in a social setting. The specific creative products involved a combination of improvisation, composition, and expressive performance to varying degrees (Webster, 1990, 2002). Fautley’s (2005) notion of location of composition elements could also be seen within each case, from individual trial-and-error experiences to socially negotiating the manipulation of musical structures. Finally, each context involved improvisation as a necessary precursor to composing (Thornton, 2013), and each
teacher participant strongly believed in the benefits of such an approach. In the following section, I will examine the specific goals for composition activities set by each teacher participant, and discuss how these goals intersect with relevant scholarship.

**Goals of Composition Activities**

The philosophical framing of how composition activities can be defined within secondary instrumental music curricula informs the specific goals that secondary instrumental music teachers set for such activities. In this section, the goals of composition activities within each case will be presented, as well as relevant scholarship relating to these goals. These varied ideal results of composition activities speak to the philosophical framing of each teacher participant, specifically the rationale that they rely on to include composition activities within their curricula, as well as the particular student experiences during the compositional process.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

Through observations of the Walberg Middle School eighth grade band and interviews with Mr. Porter, it became clear that his most valued element of composition activities was the understanding of harmony and harmonic progressions, melody, and meter. “By the end of middle school, the students will know I, IV, and V chords in major tonality,” said Mr. Porter. His focus on harmony, melody, and meter was based on his perception that these elements hold more relevance in students’ musical lives.

For me, music has a harmonic framework or structure typically. … I think that’s mostly what kids listen to when they listen to music. I think they focus on pop music, some country, and a lot of Hip Hop and R&B. There are beats and they are structured harmonically. (Interview, April 12, 2022)

When asked about the role of creative musical activities involving found sounds, sound effects, or “soundscapes” (layers of sound with no discernable pulse), Mr. Porter said that he does not
prioritize that type of composition. “I don’t see it as musically valid as someone trying to understand harmony. I find it very cool, but I would categorize that more as sound effects rather than music.”

The ultimate goal of composition activities, according to Mr. Porter, was for his students to develop an understanding and appreciation of musical structures present in the music his students listen to. For him, it was important for students to understand how the musical structures of harmony, meter, form, melody, and style can be manipulated individually or in combination and the result of these elements. “It’s important that students gain a deeper understanding of these musical structures so that they can appreciate music in their own lives,” Mr. Porter said. When recalling a conversation he had with his friends about whether or not the understanding of something invites appreciation of that thing, he said, “With greater understanding comes the capacity for greater appreciation.” Put another way, understanding is essential to allow for the possibility of appreciation, but does not guarantee appreciation. Mr. Porter went on to say, “The goal is to render myself obsolete, for students to continue to understand and appreciate music as a form of agency.” By allowing rehearsal time and energy toward opportunities involving divergent thinking and individual student creation, he has transferred the motivation and driving force for music teaching and learning from a singular goal of accurate performance toward a multitude of independent learning goals of individual musical understanding.

Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy

Mr. Stevens developed goals for the Skylerville Academy seventh and eighth grade band students based on the National Core Arts Standards of Create, Perform, Respond, and Connect (NCCAS, 2016). When focusing on the “Create” standards, he described the value in helping students understand the harmonic foundation of the music that they listen to. Similar to Mr. Porter, Mr. Stevens wanted his students to take what they learned about musical structures in
band and apply them in “real world” musical situations. These musical structures, according to Mr. Stevens, included tonal melodic and harmonic musical material as well as found sounds, soundscapes, and sound effects. The students in both the seventh and eighth grade bands at Skylerville Academy explored found sounds, soundscapes, and sound effects in their compositions. An eighth grade student, Layla, explained the reasoning behind including sound effects and tonal melodies.

We chose one thing that we wanted to do a sound effect on, that was the horse. It was my partner, she played two notes back and forth. … After the horse stops riding, she doesn’t really do anything, she just looks around [in the video game video], so we just created a smooth, calming melody. (Interview, April 28th, 2022)

Apart from the necessity of the music education field to include creative musical activities, Mr. Stevens also believed that composition activities could help some students flourish who may not be the strongest performers on their instruments. “I believe there are different musical intelligences, and if they can’t perform well, maybe they can come up with a beautiful melody. This is something we do not focus on nearly enough in our profession.” However, he also noted the dangers of focusing too much time on creative musical activities and not enough time on the development of executive skills needed for students to play their instruments in a characteristic manner. “I want them to be as well rounded as they can be,” stated Mr. Stevens.

**Mr. Vance – Effington High School**

Similar to Mr. Stevens, Mr. Vance believed that there is a difference between the development of executive skills needed for band students to accurately and appropriately perform traditional concert band works and the creative musicianship that can be developed through creative musical activities, including composition. He pointed to the two concert ensembles that he teaches: Wind Ensemble, an ensemble reserved for those students who
perform well in an audition; and Concert Band, an ensemble that consisted primarily of younger students (ninth and tenth grade) who may not possess strong executive skills and older students (11th and 12th grade) who may be unmotivated to develop their executive skills beyond what they have already attained. Mr. Vance admitted that the audition in place served to track the students who were motivated to improve their own performance abilities on their instruments and place them in the Wind Ensemble, and that these types of performance abilities were not accurate predictors of students’ potential with creative musical activities. “The differences you get with Wind Ensemble students is not necessarily hipper musical decisions, they’re just able to do more things on their instruments which opens up wider doors.” The inclusion of composition activities allowed students in each band, regardless of performance skill level, to develop their creative musicianship and creative identities.

Additionally, Mr. Vance felt that instrumental music programs must focus on “developing a holistic understanding of music so students have the ability to understand and appreciate the music that they encounter throughout life.” This appreciation-through-understanding notion is nearly identical to those stated by Mr. Porter and Mr. Stevens. For Mr. Vance, a holistic understanding of music involved knowledge and experiences with unpacking compositional techniques, including harmony, melody, form, meter, rhythm, and expression. For instance, he would devote rehearsal time to discussing a composer’s use of rhythm, and isolating that element to demonstrate how other composers of various musical styles might implement a similar compositional technique. Through observations of rehearsals, interviews with Mr. Vance, and interviews with his students, he does not only aim for meaningful performances of prewritten musical works, but also for meaningful musical interactions and subsequent understandings through the inclusion of composition activities.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**
While each teacher participant in this study approached their specific composition activity differently, the underlying goal of deeper musical understanding was present. The philosophical framing of each teacher participant presented above provides three distinct yet interrelated approaches toward the rationale of including composition activities within secondary band curricula. In this section, I will present relevant scholarship regarding the notion of process over product, the National Core Arts Standards, and student-led experiences.

**Process Over Product**

In her content analysis of studies involving collaborative composition, Strand (2009) found that teachers mainly focus on the process of creation rather than the compositional product, more complex musical elements resulted in more successful compositions, and beliefs that composition activities can help develop student’s ownership over the compositional process. These points were present within the goals of the composition activities in the three band programs of this current study. Through a focus on the understanding and use of musical elements within a composition, all three teacher participants framed composition activities aimed at developing their students’ musical understanding of the compositional process. While Mr. Porter held a view of the relevant musical elements being inclusive primarily of harmony, melody, and meter, Mr. Stevens and Mr. Vance were open to having the students also delve into a wide variety of sonic possibilities, including found sounds, soundscapes, and sound effects. In all three compositional contexts, the process of examining musical elements in an organic way (i.e., by manipulating sound through exploration) was the primary goal, and the product of the performance or written composition was secondary.

This focus on process is not to say that a final performance is unimportant. For example, Fautley’s (2005) model of collaborative composition includes a final performance as an essential part of the process. For all three teacher participants, an end goal of a final performance helped
to keep their students on track and focused on meeting a deadline. Each final performance context varied, from Mr. Porter’s students performing *Adventure Road* in their spring concert, Mr. Steven’s students performing their compositions live in front of their peers, and Mr. Vance’s students participating in a collaborative performance of their combined riffs with a student acting as a sound board. In each case, the summation activity of a final performance helped to provide a sense of closure and finality to the compositional process.

**Standards**

The National Core Arts Standards for Music (NCCAS, 2016) list creativity as an anchor standard, and include essential questions and enduring understandings for a variety of musical contexts in P-12 music. Empirical studies have found inconsistent implementation of creative musical activities (e.g., Strand, 2006) for a multitude of reasons, ranging from a lack of preservice experience with creative musical activities (e.g., Madura, 2007), a lack of instructional time and technology (e.g., Fairfield, 2010), and the difficulty of learning jazz improvisation (e.g., Forsythe, Kinney & Braun, 2007). Snell (2013) found that the national standards for music education were implemented inconsistently among instrumental music teachers in New York State, particularly those relating to creative musical activities.

For Mr. Stevens, these national standards frame his rationale for including composition activities in the middle school band curriculum. He previously studied the inclusion of creative musical activities during his master’s degree program in music education, and he has transferred those understandings to his teaching practice in a clear and practical manner. The main purpose of an instrumental ensemble is not only to prepare and perform a wide variety of music with a deep level of musical understanding, but to allow the students to work with and through the musical structures themselves in an organic way. Mr. Stevens has found that the most impactful avenue for his students to work with these musical structures is through composition activities.
Instead of viewing the national standards as a type of “to-do” list, he viewed them as a road map toward holistic music teaching and learning, resulting in his students attaining a deeper understanding and, therefore, a higher level of appreciation for various musical styles.

**Student-Led Experiences**

Creative musical activities, especially composition activities, can offer opportunities for students to be in charge of their own learning. Mr. Porter explicitly stated his aim of the composition activity as transferring the goal of students’ experiences in band rehearsal from that of performing prewritten music accurately toward independent learning opportunities, divergent thinking, and individual musical understanding. By doing this, he created a learning environment of 28 individuals leading their own path toward musical understanding through composing.

Similarly, all three teacher participants believed in the importance of including other ways for students to interact with musical structures besides performing. These multiple musical experiences are built on the notion of multiple musical intelligences, as stated by Mr. Stevens. It is not enough for an instrumental music teacher to have their students regurgitate musical information from a prewritten work. Rather, there must be opportunities for students to experience the manipulation of sound and musical structures in organic ways. This allows students the chance to develop and share their creative musicianship as separate from their instrumental performance skills (or “executive skills”). Mr. Porter claimed that the composition activities were implemented to explicitly promote individual student agency. Mr. Stevens and Mr. Vance made apparent the notion of multiple musical intelligences as the driving force behind composing activities being included.

Weidner (2020) studied the democratic, student-led ensemble experiences of concert bands and found that these opportunities lead to the development of student agency and independent decision making. Weidner’s study built on the empirical literature base of
democratic learning within instrumental ensembles. While not specifically in a context of creative musical activities, intersections of such activities with student-led learning opportunities abound, and offer a greater rationale for the inclusion of creative musical activities within instrumental music instruction.

**Summary of Goals of Composition Activities**

The reasons to include composition activities within instrumental music instruction can vary, including opportunities for musical understanding and appreciation, emphasis on process over product, reliance on the National Core Arts Standards, or student-led musical experiences promoting the development of individual student agency. Based on previous scholarship, each of these goals are present within instrumental music. For the three teacher participants in this study, they all believe the ultimate goal of composition activities is a greater musical understanding through a focus on process over product, as well as the significance of student-led musical experiences. Ultimately, the depth of creative experience for students in instrumental ensembles is based on the individual instrumental music teacher’s philosophical framing of musical creativity and their practical implementation of creative musical activities. In the following section, I will explore how precursors to composition activities are approached within the secondary instrumental music classrooms of this study.

**Precursors to Composition Activities**

While creative musical activities are valued within P-12 instruction, many students are not afforded opportunities to create musical improvisations or compositions within their instrumental music programs. When students do engage with creative musical activities, they are often one-off experiences that are not built into the instrumental music program in a structural way. The scaffolding of musical experiences needed for students to be successfully creative is an important element of creative musical activities for music teachers to consider. In this section, I
will present the various precursors to composition activities that each teacher participant
described as being important for their students, as well as their students’ descriptions of previous
experiences with creative musical activities. Next, I will examine relevant scholarship on the
precursors to composition activities and illuminate intersections with data from this study.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

While discussing the previous creative musical experiences of the eighth grade band
students at Walberg Middle School, Mr. Porter described how they learned a band piece with an
improvisatory section involving I, IV, and V in B-flat major tonality. Prior to the start of the
composition activity with the band piece *Adventure Road*, he scaffolded students’ experiences
with harmonic structures by starting with playing the bass line, followed by chord tones, leading
to the addition of passing tones and eventually melodic improvisation. Mr. Porter believed that
there needs to be more pieces of music with opportunities for students to improvise over
common harmonic progressions, which is the reason that he decided to compose *Adventure Road*
during his doctoral studies.

In addition to the eighth grade concert band, Mr. Porter taught the eighth grade jazz band,
which met twice each week. When the students were learning a new piece, they would first learn
the melody by ear, beginning with blues tunes. The eighth grade band students did not have a
significant amount of prior experience learning tunes by ear, partly due to the limited in-person
instruction from the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of this, Mr. Porter implemented exercises
where students listened to a melody and dictated rhythmic and melodic notation. After months of
these exercises, the eighth grade jazz band students were able to more successfully learn tunes by
ear fairly quickly. “I think it’s because of all the time I spent with rhythm reading and writing
exercises,” Mr. Porter said.
During the eighth grade concert band student focus group interview, I asked the students what creative musical activities they had experienced prior to the composition activity. The students responded by describing how they collaboratively composed and arranged a piece earlier in the school year, based on *When the Saints Go Marching In*. When asked what is different with this activity, Chad, an eighth grade percussionist, replied, “Now we’re learning music theory and how to improvise.” Luka, an eighth grade euphonium player, stated, “At first, I felt scared because you were going to get called on to share what you came up with,” but that it became easier to share their creative ideas the more creative musical activities in which they participated.

Mr. Porter believed that in order for his students to be successful in creative musical activities, their competence with musical knowledge and skills needed to be developed. As the students had very little prior experience with creative musical activities prior to that school year, Mr. Porter took it upon himself to provide these experiences for his students, scaffolding them from understanding harmonic progressions, to collaborative arranging, to improvisation, and eventually composition, all based on similar harmonic functions of I, IV, and V in B-flat major tonality. When asked what other ways we can build students’ competence with these musical structures as a precursor for creative musical activities, Mr. Porter said, “Ideally, we can build students’ competence through collaboration with other music teachers and musically informed parents.” This acknowledged that students draw from a wide variety of musical experiences during creative musical activities, and that the development of students’ musical competence does not rest solely on one stakeholder.

**Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy**

Similar to Mr. Porter, Mr. Stevens would focus students’ attention toward the harmonic foundation of music within multiple musical contexts, including the warm-up process,
performing wind band works, and creating original compositions. He utilized a visual representation, typically on the white board or projected on the wall in the front of the band room, which labeled the pitches within chords I, IV, and V in major tonality. Mr. Stevens said that he often focused a portion of instructional time on harmonic progressions regardless of whether the students were engaged in a creative musical activity. This focus on harmony was also due to the fact that so much of the music that the band students experience in their lives was based on similar harmonic progressions that they experienced in band.

In the eighth grade band focus group interview, I asked the students what made them choose the specific videos for their video game soundtrack projects. Multiple students responded that they do not actually enjoy video games, and that they needed to have prior experiences with either the specific video game or the type of music from the video game in order to want to choose it. Layla said, “Can I be honest? I hate video games so much. I partnered with [student’s name] and she chose the video because she knows video games.” The students were not inclined to choose a video without prior experiences or specific knowledge of that particular video game. Ryan, an eighth grade trombonist, said, “My favorite part is having video games from my childhood, and composing to it. Hearing what’s in your mind coming alive. The different parts of the game, and the sound effects, too. It’s hilarious.” The personal connections to the material proved to be a great motivator for the eighth grade students.

During the seventh grade band student focus group interview, I asked the students how they came up with a specific aural image of the order of their “Whoosh, Ding, Boom” sound compositions. Jack related their experience with the sound composition to their previous experiences with creating the thunderstorm composition, stating, “It’s like a real life simulation of how it works.” He went on to describe his group’s process for creating their sound composition: “With this one, it’s whatever we come up with. We’re using our musical interests
to make something new.” The seventh grade students, similar to the eighth grade students, based their compositions on their prior lived experiences. When asked about how the formal structure of musical compositions played into their sound composition, Jack replied, “I made mine that was based on the intro to a movie, the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century Fox theme. Most music either starts soft and ends loud, or starts loud and ends soft, the rest is up to us.” When asked to elaborate, Jack said, “It’s up to what we know. What we’ve experienced in our lives up to this point.” The lived experiences of the students, including their specific sound worlds, played an integral role in their compositions.

**Mr. Vance – Effington High School**

Similar to Mr. Porter and Mr. Stevens, Mr. Vance felt that students should understand the role of harmony within music as a way to both understand and appreciate music from a variety of musical styles, and as an avenue for musical creativity. He sequenced the instruction related to harmony first by focusing on the root notes of each chord, followed by the chord tones, and finally changing between chords. This understanding of basic harmonic function is absolutely necessary for students to be musically creative, according to Mr. Vance. Regarding the role of harmony during the collaborative “riff building” composition activity, he said, “When it’s all put together as a group, it sounds right in a sense. There’s not someone playing some random flat that doesn’t fit within the chord.”

Mr. Vance also utilized a visual aid during instruction relating to harmonic progressions, similar to Mr. Porter and Mr. Stevens. “Many students need visuals of chord progressions every single time,” he said. Mr. Vance also color coded the harmonic progression (e.g., blue for I, red for IV, green for V) in order to provide another way for students to engage with the musical knowledge, even if they avoided musical terminology. “It’s up there to let us know what to play when we improvise,” said Mr. Vance.
Apart from an understanding of harmony, Mr. Vance acknowledges that students’ musical understandings are framed significantly by their social worlds, including their prior experiences and the musical influences of their family. “Most of their musicianship comes from their family. Maybe they come from a musical family and they can hear pitches and discern meter, or maybe they can’t do any of those things.” He believed his role was to provide students a scaffolded path toward deeper musical understanding while acknowledging and honoring students’ individual musical identities, prior knowledge, and skill.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

Each teacher participant in this study was cognizant of the importance of precursors to the composition activities which I observed. While each teacher approached previous creative musical experiences differently, they were all scaffolded in a meaningful way for the students to be successful with current and future creative musical activities. In this section, I will present relevant scholarship regarding the precursors of composition activities, including Webster’s (2002) notion of enabling skills and conditions and the role of competence.

**Enabling Skills and Conditions**

Webster’s (2002) model of “Creative Thinking in Music” outlined the various types of creative products and aspects that influence the creative musical process. Creative thinking “is a dynamic process of alternation between convergent and divergent thinking, moving in stages over time, enabled by certain skills (both innate and learned), and by certain conditions, all resulting in a final product” (Webster, 2002, p. 26). This section is framed by the enabling skills and enabling conditions as described by Webster, and will include specific examples from each case within this study.

Of particular importance here are the enabling skills, which are the individual skills that are often the result of formal education, including aptitudes, conceptual understanding,
craftsmanship, and aesthetic sensitivity. The musical aptitudes of students in each case certainly influenced the creative process and the resultant compositional products, but only Mr. Porter at Walberg Middle School formally assessed his students’ musical aptitude using the “Advanced Measures of Musical Audiation” (Gordon, 1989). These assessments were completed to help Mr. Porter form lesson groups based on students’ instrumentation as well as their musical aptitudes, but it gave Mr. Porter a sense of which students might be more successful with this compositional activity. Each teacher participant focused instructional time toward their students’ conceptual understanding of harmony with the hope that this would transfer to other musical contexts and allow for deeper musical understanding and appreciation across genres and styles.

The specific elements of compositional craftsmanship were approached mainly from feedback from each teacher participant toward their students. This occurred in a variety of contexts, including Mr. Porter providing individual feedback on students’ compositions in small group lessons, Mr. Stevens assisting small groups with refining their sound compositions or their video game soundtracks, and Mr. Vance demonstrating an expressive performance as the human sound board for the collaboratively composed piece built on riffs. The “craft” of composing was not the ultimate goal for each teacher participant, but they provided scaffolded instruction that led their students’ compositions to become more clearly structured and have greater expressive potential. This expressive potential provided the basis for aesthetic sensitivity, which to some extent was an aim for each teacher participant. Whether it was labeled as phrasing, expression, dynamic contour, or story arch, the musical performances of students’ compositions were held to standards that included opportunities for expressive performance.

While enabling skills are typically identified within individuals, the enabling conditions involve both personal as well as social and cultural contexts. The personal context of enabling conditions involve subconscious imagery, motivation, and personality. As described by multiple
teacher participants, as well as multiple student participants, prior lived experiences play an integral role in both the motivation to complete the activity and the depth of experience with the activity. For example, as the Skylerville Academy seventh grade band student Jack said, “It’s up to what we know. What we’ve experienced in our lives up to this point.” This frame of lived experience influenced the subconscious imagery, the motivation, as well as the personality of each student participating in the composition activity.

The social and cultural forms of enabling conditions involve the context, task, peer influence, and past experience (Webster, 2002). Each case involved musical compositions within differing musical and social contexts, from the formal harmonic structure of Mr. Porter’s *Adventure Road* to the “anything goes” approach of the eighth grade band students’ video game soundtracks at Skylerville Academy. The involvement of improvisation as a precursor to composition also played a key role in the social nature of the task since these initial improvisatory experiences occurred in a group setting within each case. The influence of peers was most evident in cases involving collaborative composition, especially the seventh grade sound compositions and the eighth grade video game soundtracks at Skylerville Academy as the students were working in small groups. The individual students’ preferences and personalities were on display during these small group interactions, and the final compositional products were significantly influenced from these interactions. The whole group collaboration during Effington High School’s riff building activity also included elements of peer influence as decisions were made mostly as a group, including which riffs to select for the final composition. Similar to the lived experiences of students described above, the past musical, social, and cultural experiences of students influenced the composition activities. Prior experiences with improvisation and composition helped Mr. Vance’s high school band students enter their riff building activity with belief in themselves and their musical abilities to be successful. As Mr. Porter’s students stated,
with less experience with creative musical activities, the composition activities can be more daunting, especially when it comes to students sharing their creative products. The cultural experiences of students also influenced the composition activities, especially the eighth grade band students at Skylerville Academy and their video game soundtracks. If the students did not have a social and cultural understanding of a specific video, they were not willing to select that video to use as the basis of their soundtrack composition. If students could identify with a video and had a type of personal, meaningful engagement with the video or video game, then they were much more likely to select the video and have a clear idea of how to structure their collaborative soundtrack compositions.

**Competence**

Mr. Porter specifically spoke of the importance of building students’ competence with regard to musical knowledge and skill. Competence can be defined in a variety of ways, but here I will examine competence as a crucial element of the Basic Psychological Needs Theory, a mini-theory nested within Self Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Ryan and Deci (2017). The psychological need of competence includes a person’s feeling of being effective and experiencing opportunities to express their full capacity within the social environment. “In SDT, competence refers to our basic need to feel effectance and mastery. People need to feel able to operate effectively within their important life contexts” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 11). An important aspect of the need for competence involves the balance between perceived level of skill and the difficulty of the task, which will lead one to find an optimal challenge in order to maintain or build competence. “It wanes in contexts in which challenges are too difficult, negative feedback is pervasive, or feelings of mastery and effectiveness are diminished or undermined by interpersonal factors such as person-focused criticism or social comparisons” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 11). The balance between perceived skill and difficulty of task is very
similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) theory of flow, which states that “optimal experience requires a balance between the challenges perceived in a given situation and the skills a person brings to it” (p. 30).

Mr. Porter focused on developing musical and creative competence among his eighth grade band students within the one academic year that he taught them. He sequentially introduced musical elements that students were able to experience in multiple musical contexts, including listening, playing, improvising, and composing. Through a carefully scaffolded approach, he was able to simultaneously develop his students’ musical knowledge and skill, and in turn, build his students’ musical competence. This was evidenced by Mr. Porter’s description of his students’ progress, “I think it’s because of all the time I spent with rhythm reading and writing exercises.” Another insightful piece of evidence was the description by the eighth grade band student Luka, “At first, I felt scared because you were going to get called on to share what you came up with,” but that it became easier to share their creative ideas the more creative musical activities in which they participated. The focus on deepening both one’s actual knowledge and skill, as well as the belief in one’s current level of knowledge and skill, is crucial for developing competence. In crafting meaningful creative musical experiences for his students, Mr. Porter was steadfast in focusing on building his students’ musical and creative competence.

**Summary of Precursors to Composition Activities**

Each of the teacher participants in this study sought to provide meaningful musical experiences for their students through composition activities in their classrooms. The way in which each teacher participant set up the activities was unique and was necessarily based on their students’ prior musical experiences with various musical elements, including harmonic structures, as well as their prior experiences with creative musical activities. Mr. Porter intentionally scaffolded instruction based on harmonic progressions, arranging, improvising, and
composing, which all led to the composition activity with the piece *Adventure Road*. Mr. Stevens allowed his seventh and eighth grade students to collaborate in small groups to create compositions, all while drawing on their musical understanding of the harmonic structures in the music that they listen to every day. Similarly, Mr. Vance aimed to develop his students’ musical understanding through harmonic progressions, and based the collaborative riff building composition activity within a particular repeated harmony. The enabling skills and conditions that impacted each students’ composition varied depending on the specific context and structure of the compositional task, but all were influenced by the musical understanding, prior lived experiences, and social and cultural experiences of the student composers. An integral aspect of pedagogy relating to creative musical activities is how to develop the musical knowledge, skill, and understanding of students while simultaneously developing their belief in this knowledge, skill, and understanding. In the following section, I will explore the benefits and challenges of including composition activities in secondary instrumental music curricula, as told by the teacher participants in this study.

**Benefits and Challenges of Including Composition Activities in Secondary Instrumental Music Curricula**

While creative musical activities are reported to be valued within instrumental music education (e.g., NCCAS, 2016), there are many reported obstacles that prevent teachers from implementing effective creative musical activities (e.g., Madura, 2007). It is important to consider the numerous philosophical and logistical aspects of instrumental music programs when implementing creative musical activities, namely, the balance between creative process and musically refined product. In this section, I will report how each teacher participant described the benefits and challenges of including composition activities within their curricula. Following, I will summarize these benefits and challenges with relevant scholarship to demonstrate how these
teacher participants effectively overcame the perceived obstacles to afford creative musical experiences for their students.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

The eighth grade band students who participated in the focus group interview at Walberg Middle School were excited to share what they felt were the benefits of composition activities. Chad described the process of beginning the composition, and how it is easiest “once you know the chords, and how to get it started.” He went on to explain that it is most helpful to work in small groups, such as in the small group lessons, and receive feedback directly from Mr. Porter. “Once you feel confident in your own part, you can branch out and add more to it,” Chad said. When asked if the composition activity motivated them to practice their instruments at home, each student agreed that it did. Luka said that he was especially motivated to practice at home after a year of participating mostly online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He said, “I feel like I got way more into playing music this year. Before, band was just a thing I did. But now, I actually love playing music.” When asked what the most fun part of the composition activity was, Chad replied, “The freedom to get to make something you think sounds cool.” He went on to describe how he enjoys writing music outside of band. Luka agreed, and said, “It’s fun. It’s more fun than anything else we’ve done before. It’s way more fun to create something.”

When asked about the downside of including creative musical activities, Mr. Porter described the challenge of shifting the focus away from the product and toward the process of creating music. He described one specific challenge of emails from parents asking why the bands are not playing specific pieces, or less pieces, on a concert program. Mr. Porter said, “You’re constantly defending something that’s not traditional. It’s hard, and it’s taxing.” Going further, he said, “It’s the expectation to perform, to entertain” that is the main source of resistance against the inclusion of more process-oriented creative musical experiences. One particular benefit that
Mr. Porter noted was that, “In my experience doing these composition activities, I don’t need to spend as much time on notes and rhythms,” highlighting the transfer of musical understanding from the creative musical activities to the rest of the music that the students play. He described it as an initial commitment of time devoted toward creative musical activities that will pay dividends later. “It’s almost like an investment in the future. I’m teaching these things so that in the future, they are relying much less on the teacher and deciding more and more for themselves.” Mr. Porter aimed to have his students in situations where they would make musical decisions for themselves, with the ultimate goal of deeper musical understanding and the development of student agency.

Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy

In describing the benefits of utilizing graphic notation for the seventh grade sound composition, Mr. Stevens said, “Personally, I believe it is helpful because they can see contour and see shape that way.” The expressive demands of the sound compositions were far greater than what the students might experience in a typical band piece, and Mr. Stevens agreed that the students approached the sound compositions with more expression in general. “[The students] are way more expressive. Part of it is that they’re still learning executive skills on their instruments so they don’t have the full expressive capacity on their instruments.” This balance of creativity and executive skills was evident in each case, but Mr. Stevens pointed directly to this balance as something that fuels his teaching. “I try to make them as well rounded as they can be. One difficulty of including these composition exercises is that it won’t help the students if they know a lot about composition but not about playing their instrument.” Going further, he explained that any music educator does not have to be “all in” with creative musical activities. Instead, they can easily build creative activities into warm-ups, or small snippets of rehearsal, and not take a whole class period to devote to one creative musical activity. “It’s rooted in the
idea that we’re a performing ensemble, but it’s silly to think that we can’t have both,” Mr. Stevens said.

When asked what is given up by a focus on creative musical activities, Mr. Stevens replied, “I don’t feel like I’m giving anything up.” In explaining his response, he described how in order to help mitigate time “lost” in rehearsal on creative musical activities, “The only thing given up is time, but whenever possible I try to double down on those practice skills so that they know how to use their time better.” He admits that it is difficult to ensure that all students are practicing their instruments every night. However, Mr. Stevens believed that instrumental music teachers have more time than they might admit to focus on things other than notes and rhythms. Mr. Stevens paraphrased a quote from a collegiate band director at a conducting symposium that he attended, saying “It’s ridiculous how much time high school bands have to rehearse, and it’s easy to let time slip away with announcements, attendance, and minutiae.” Mr. Stevens pointed to the fact that he often included portions of rehearsal devoted toward an element of creative musical activities throughout the school year. “It’s important to me, so I find time.”

**Mr. Vance – Effington High School**

When asked what is given up by a focus on creative musical activities, Mr. Vance stated, “If you’re doing it well, nothing.” Similar to Mr. Stevens, he agreed that the biggest complaint is usually something along the lines of giving up rehearsal time. Mr. Vance believed that if an instrumental music teacher is dependent on every minute of rehearsal time, then they need to change their thoughts on programming repertoire.

My motto has been, “If this piece is more than 16 bars that needs hardcore practice, it’s too difficult.” Knowing full well, even if I hold a grade over their head, it doesn’t matter. … If you program your concerts in an intentional way, you give up nothing. (Interview with Mr. Vance, May 17th, 2022)
Going further, Mr. Vance admitted that there are rehearsals in which he wished there might be more time to work out a section of music, but “that’s up to how you paced your own rehearsals.” Similar to Mr. Stevens, Mr. Vance believed that creative musical activities can be woven into portions of a rehearsal without taking over the whole time. “Students see it as part of band class. It’s not a one-off event, like ‘Theory Thursdays.’ It’s part of what we do,” Mr. Vance said.

Mr. Vance’s concert band students agreed that the benefits of including creative musical activities outweighs the challenges. When asked about their experiences of creating riffs in rehearsal, Jamie, a tenth grade trombone player, said, “It helps your confidence with your ability to play on your own. You start to trust the people around you and start to understand how they work musically, and what they prefer, and you start to work together.” Similarly, students in the wind ensemble focus group interview also felt that these activities were worthwhile. Vinny said that participating in activities similar to the riff building activity can help motivate students to bring their instruments home and experiment with sounds. He said, “Instead of, ‘Oh I have to go home and practice,’ it’s more, ‘Oh, I get to go home and practice.’ It’s way more fun.” Another wind ensemble student, Chelsea, a tenth grade French horn player, said,

You might hear something cool from class and say, “Hey, I like that. I want to add on to that and make it bigger.” Like, adding a beat or a melodic progression that you really like. You can build off of that and make it bigger. (Wind Ensemble Student Focus Group Interview, May 17th, 2022)

Similarly, Clara, a twelfth grade oboist, described an experience of learning a song by rote during band, and how that also played into the motivation to explore musical possibilities at home.

Sometimes we’ll take a song and by ear we’ll try to play it. We did an Adele song earlier this year, and it was just for fun. It helps us get the ability to go home by ourselves and
listen to songs and transcribe them. (Wind Ensemble Student Focus Group Interview, May 17th, 2022)

The other students agreed, and added that if they were tired of working on a particular piece of music, it was enjoyable to take a break and learn a song by rote.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

As stated in Chapter I, music educators report having strong support of including composing as part of their curricula (Hopkins, 2013; Schopp, 2006; Strand, 2006; Vecchio & Hopkins, 2021). However, studies have found many perceived obstacles that in-service music educators report as preventing them from implementing creative musical activities. These obstacles include a lack of instructional time and technology (Fairfield, 2010; Strand, 2006) and inadequate prerequisite creative experiences (Madura, 2007). The teacher participants in this study acknowledged the common apprehensions of including creative musical activities in their curricula. Mr. Porter was forthright and honest about the difficulty of balancing the rich experiences of the creative process with the demand of a refined musical product for a concert performance. In the opening vignette of Chapter I, I also lamented the demands of public performance and how limiting that can be for potential experiences in the instrumental music classroom.

The literature concerning the inclusion of creative musical activities within large ensembles reflects the historical traditions of performing works by others, and the limited curricular and logistical resources reserved for creative musical activities (e.g., Allsup, 2002). By adjusting the goals of an instrumental music program from those that are solely performance oriented toward those that are process driven, there are elements of past performance practice that need to be reexamined and potentially altered. For instance, the programming practices of instrumental ensembles have traditionally been to select music that contains the greatest
technical and musical demands of the musicians within the limitations of rehearsal time. As Mr. Vance stated, these practices should be reexamined and adjusted so that the student musicians are afforded time during rehearsals for creative musical activities. Mr. Porter and Mr. Stevens added that creative musical activities should not take over an entire rehearsal, rather they can be implemented in small doses throughout each rehearsal over the course of an academic year. The approaches described by the teacher participants of implementing composition activities within their secondary instrumental ensembles were grounded in the goals of musical understanding and fostering student agency, and they offer a holistic approach to instrumental music education that many music educators may find valuable.

Summary of Teacher Thought and Pedagogy of Composition Activities

This chapter examined each teacher participant’s philosophical underpinnings for the inclusion of creative musical activities within their secondary instrumental curricula. The way in which each teacher participant framed the definition of composition was slightly different, although each believed that improvisation serves as a necessary precursor to composition. The goals of composition activities were similarly varied, but each teacher asserted the importance of developing a deep musical understanding among their students. Students’ prior musical, social, and cultural experiences frame the composition activity, and must not be overlooked. By carefully scaffolding creative musical instruction, instrumental students can be afforded worthwhile creative musical experiences that balance their musical understanding and their executive skills on their instrument. There are a host of reported obstacles that teachers list as preventing them from implementing effective instruction with creative musical activities. However, the teacher participants in this study refused to allow these obstacles to serve as excuses, and instead reframed the goal of instrumental music education as that of creative process over refined musical product. These philosophical perspectives serve to illuminate the
promising practices of instrumental music educators who wish to provide holistic instruction through the inclusion of creative musical activities for their students.
Chapter VI

Power

This chapter will explore the role of power as it relates to the creative process within the context of the three cases of this study. The previous chapters presented the actions of teacher participants during the composition activities (Chapter IV) and the philosophical perspectives of teacher participants toward their composition activities (Chapter V). Framed by Foucault’s (1980) notion of power as constituted through acceptable forms of knowledge, understanding, and truth, this chapter will first examine power in relation to the role of band, particularly the power of teacher participants over their curriculum and the power of creative experiences within band. Next, the role of the teacher during the composition process will be considered, followed by voices of students describing their experiences during the composition activities. Finally, teacher participants’ responses to the question “Where does power reside?” within the creative process will be explored, including the notions of ownership and authority, as well as social justice perspectives as they relate to creative musical activities. Through interrogating the role of power from these varied perspectives, a complete picture of the various approaches toward creative musical activities will be presented.

The Role of Band

In this section, I will examine the way in which music educators approach the philosophical role of band in regard to power structures. I will illuminate teacher participants’ approaches toward negotiating power in the band classroom and the impact this has on their students, particularly during creative musical activities. First, I will present findings from each
case in relation to the external curricular forces on the curricular structures and the power of the
teacher participants to include creative musical activities. I will also explore the internal
negotiation of power within the large ensemble structure during creative musical activities. Next,
I will present relevant scholarship that intersects with these notions of power and the role of band
in order to provide a rich discussion on the impacts of the external and internal considerations of
power.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

Mr. Porter described a number of the initiatives that Walberg Public Schools had
implemented in recent years. One was a focus on promoting “resilience,” or the notion of “stick-
to-it-iveness,” among the students of Walberg Middle School. However, Mr. Porter noted a
number of students in seventh grade band had dropped the class without an in-depth discussion
with Mr. Porter. Some of the students had dropped the band class because their grades were
being lowered, and even though they had earned a relatively high grade (such as 96%) in band,
this grade would lower the student’s grade point average. “We do things that look good on
paper,” said Mr. Porter. An example of this was how the school district was not steadfast with its
focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. “We celebrate Juneteenth, but we are not allowed to
teach about, or say anything about, Critical Race Theory.”

Regarding the autonomy of teachers to make curricular decisions, Mr. Porter described
the power struggles that occur over this. “We’re not sure who is in charge. It is not the teachers.
Is it the parents? The administrators? The students?” He went on to say,

Considering all the stakeholders, everyone should have input on what is important.
Ultimately it comes down to the teacher, that’s why they’re the teacher. The buck stops
with the teacher. They’re the one that’s in the classroom and has a pulse on what’s going
For Mr. Porter, the ideal power structure would include a type of mutual negotiation between teachers and students, with some input from other stakeholders, including building principals, parents, community members, and fellow music educators.

Specifically regarding the role that band plays within Walberg Middle School, Mr. Porter acknowledged that the school has a history of a strong band program with significant student participation. However, within that history are the expectations that the band program operates around a busy performance calendar and that the ensembles are held to very high musical standards. By focusing instructional time toward creative musical activities, Mr. Porter said, “I feel like I’m not doing my job, because so much of what music teachers are expected to do is rehearse the whole time.”

He went on to say that this focus on squeezing the most out of every instructional minute does not occur in other classrooms in the building. For example, in an English class, students may be provided with time to do work on their own, such as read a book. When asked why instrumental music cannot operate in a similar way, Mr. Porter replied, “The pressure to perform. The fact that music education is stuck in post-industrialist mentality of machine and behavioralist mentalities. ‘I will control you.’ Teacher as master, teacher as expert, the holder of all wisdom.”

However, through a focus on creative musical activities, such as the composition activity that I observed, Mr. Porter was trying to reframe this pressure to perform and focus on the process of experiencing musical structures on a deeper and more meaningful level.

Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy

Mr. Stevens explained that Skylerville Academy was a relatively new school, having only been opened for five years. The philosophy of the school is to integrate different subjects and
domains together in an interdisciplinary manner. He provided an example of students completing research and writing projects similar to those in International Baccalaureate schools. “They do a ‘passion project’ where they put all of their energies into some sort of product, similar to the show Shark Tank. It is typically a design challenge based on ways to help serve the community.” Mr. Stevens went on to say that the relevance of the arts within this school structure was through the collaborative and social nature of ensembles.

Specifically concerning band, Mr. Stevens believed that teachers must exert their autonomy over their programs in order to include creative musical activities. This focus on creative musical activities is needed, in part, to provide a holistic music education for the band students through a focus on the four anchor standards of the National Core Music Standards (NCCAS, 2016). Within the Skylerville Academy band program, he has made it a point to consistently include composition activities as part of the curriculum over the past several years. The inclusion of composition activities, according to Mr. Stevens, provides his students another avenue to demonstrate musical understanding beyond performing on their band instrument. He added, “This is something we do not focus on nearly enough in our profession.”

**Mr. Vance – Effington High School**

Concerning the role of the Effington High School music program within the school district and community as a whole, Mr. Vance described it as explicitly promoting individual student agency development and students’ personal freedom of expression. The extramusical goals of the band program, according to Mr. Vance, are to provide a safe space for students to be themselves. “Especially teaching in a politically conservative county, the band program gives students a safe space to explore themselves and explore something they haven’t explored before.” For example, the same day that I was observing the band program of Effington High School, a school board meeting was scheduled for that evening, and a particularly vocal
community member was sharing on social media that they were going to be protesting aspects of the school curriculum that promoted diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as social and emotional learning. Conversely, Mr. Vance took pride in the fact that students were able to freely discuss and share within his classroom, including topics such as gender identity and the use of preferred pronouns. He saw the safe space of his classroom as “a beacon amidst the chaos” where his students were allowed to be themselves.

Mr. Vance approached teaching and learning of musical elements through discovery in band. He believed that the context of band should not simply focus on performing a small number of wind band works throughout the school year, but to explore a wide variety of musical styles, artists, genres, and contexts. He said, “The musical role of band is to expose them to as much music as I can, and to get them comfortable creating music, whatever that means for them.” Similar to Mr. Stevens, Mr. Vance consistently and systematically included creative musical activities with the band program at Effington High School. These were included, in part, to help students experience music in a holistic and engaging way that would promote deeper musical understanding and, ideally, lifelong musical appreciation.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

The teacher participants of this study experienced varying forms of external control on their curricula, as well as varying contexts of social power structures within their classrooms. In this section I will examine the ever-growing movement in educational policy to control public schools’ curricula, particularly through “divisive concepts laws.” Next, I will consider the power structures inherent within large ensembles and how creative musical activities may assist in dismantling autocratic styles of teaching. Throughout these discussions, the philosophical role of band and how it intersects with power will remain in the foreground.
Power Over Curriculum

The notion of who makes curricular decisions involves many levels. These levels include federal mandates and state board of education requirements, local district mission statements and their governance through locally elected boards of education, and the specific content area and the curricular structures in place for each subject within each grade level. The ways in which music educators respond to curricular decisions will be considered in this section. Within educational policy, as recently as September 2022, there are numerous states that are attempting to pass laws which prohibit certain topics from being addressed in public schools. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) has organized events, such as town hall meetings and webinars, meant to educate music educators on these policy efforts which they refer to as divisive concepts laws. “Divisive concepts laws are state legislation, executive orders, and educational policies that ban certain concepts at school. The laws primarily address race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and history” (NAfME Divisive Concepts Laws Town Hall, 2022).

Mr. Porter described the local level ban of discussing Critical Race Theory as a divisive concept in Walberg Public Schools, and Mr. Vance described members of the Effington community as being resistant to school curricula that were related to notions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as social and emotional learning or Critical Race Theory. As more states take aim on banning these sorts of topics within public schools, music educators will need to be cognizant of the impact in allowing personal expression regarding these “divisive concepts,” especially within the specific contexts of creative musical activities.

Benedict and Schmidt (2011) describe the reason for music educators to approach curricular decisions through an explicitly political lens. Within music, they claim traditional notions of schooling demand that students learn primarily through recognition and response,
which pushes a narrative of musicianship as being primarily comprised of decoding musical notation.

This, of course, is directly related to notions of functional literacy that are framed by current political discourse of efficiency, standards, and market education. All which brings “quality music education” much closer to capital than our artistic and humanist dispositions would like to admit. (Benedict & Schmidt, 2011, p. 144)

Mr. Porter described the power struggle of curricular decisions within his school district, and the external pressures of public performance as a de facto assessment of the effectiveness of the music educator. “We’re not sure who is in charge. It is not the teachers,” said Mr. Porter. This limited control over the direction of the music program is similar to Benedict and Schmidt’s (2011) notion of capitalism within education. Even though there was significant curricular oversight, he was able to exert power over the particular curriculum of the eighth grade band and include creative musical activities throughout the academic year.

The curricular model of Skylerville Academy honored and encouraged entrepreneurial mindsets, similar to the neoliberal market-based approaches to education that have become common in recent decades (Benedict & Schmidt, 2011). Within music education, Kanellopoulos (2015) warned of the impact of this neoliberal focus on limiting the creative and agentive musical possibilities, instead promoting the entrepreneurial, work-related values to create a future workforce.

[I]t is argued that neoliberal discourse on creativity subverts the potential of creative music education to function as a site of engagement with social justice. It does so by way of introducing an imperceptible shift of the notion of inclusion, from a notion that relates to welcoming difference as a means for cultivating personal freedom and democratic participation, to a notion that designates readiness to be considered as a legitimate
“player” in the ruthless competitive struggle for “creative work.” (Kanellopoulos, 2015, p. 319)

Through approaching students’ “passion projects” similar to the television show Shark Tank, the hidden curriculum of Skylerville Academy could be seen as valuing market-based thought. However, Mr. Stevens exerted autonomy over the band curriculum and encouraged the development of holistic musicianship through composition activities systematically and consistently throughout the students’ time in band.

Mr. Vance described the overtly public political discourse surrounding the local role of education within the community. While these aspects of political discourse may have previously been outside the realm of consideration for a music educator, Mr. Vance felt that it was necessary to acknowledge the overarching political landscape of the community while simultaneously listening to the individual needs of students in band to safely express themselves. Acting within the confines of appropriate levels of curricular autonomy, he encouraged diversity of thought and action in band through the inclusion of creative musical activities.

Many music educators may strive to effectively and efficiently implement the curriculum that they philosophically believe to be best for their current students, but in practice find it difficult due to any number of scheduling or standardized testing roadblocks. However, each teacher has some level of curricular control within their specific classroom. While not a specific aim of this study from the start, interview data revealed that the teacher participants in this study all relied on their power over the curriculum to implement composition activities with their students. This form of negotiation of power should not be overlooked within music education, particularly concerning the inclusion of creative musical activities.
Negotiation of Power Within Ensembles

There has been a proliferation of scholarship on the role of the large ensemble in recent decades specifically concerning the negotiation of power between teacher and students. Allsup and Benedict (2008) described traditional large ensembles, specifically band, as a bastion of a military ethos, an assembly line of efficiency, and a dangerous cyclical paradigm of having preservice music teachers mimic the way they have been taught in large ensemble programs that uphold these historic systems. Some authors have called for the replacement of large ensembles with musical offerings more relevant to students’ lives (Williams, 2011).

Other authors have defended the large ensemble structure (Fonder, 2014) and have pointed out the “flimsy logic” of calls for curricular reform (Miksza, 2013). Allsup (2012) offered a potential outcome of band involving Dewey’s (1909) Moral Principles of Education, stating that band has the capacity to bring together “art, community, self-interest, and public schooling” (p. 181). These authors pointed toward the belief that positive experiences are possible within the traditional large ensemble structure.

Mr. Porter described the traditional approaches to large ensemble instruction as “teaching to the concert” and the internal mantra of the band director as “I will control you.” He believed that these approaches were not effective for developing deeper musical understanding or meaningful musical experiences within band. These forms of instructional approaches, according to Mr. Porter, needed to change, although he acknowledged the difficulty in focusing on process over performance expectations. When analyzing observation data, Mr. Porter would lead rehearsal from the front of the band room, but would often ask questions that encouraged divergent thinking and individual musical thought. This form of questioning helped to break down the structure of teacher-as-dictator and catapult the students’ role toward that of collaborator.
Mr. Stevens firmly believed in the benefits of including creative musical activities within the curricular structure of band. As an art form, he claimed, “Instrumental music is rooted in creativity.” While many school music programs are categorized within departments containing some form of the phrase “Creative Arts,” much of what typically occurs within school music programs is not overtly creative. Through calling for the profession to shift the focus toward creative musical activities, Mr. Stevens advocated for the breakdown of the power structure of teacher-as-dictator and student-as-empty-vessel. Throughout the composition projects with the seventh and eighth grade band students of Skylerville Academy, he provided them with opportunities to meet in small groups and assume leadership over their own learning.

Mr. Vance approached the Effington High School bands as a laboratory of musical understanding and appreciation through learning from students about the types of music that they enjoy and providing opportunities for students to assume responsibility over their own learning with creative musical activities. Mr. Vance promoted conductorless performances, which challenged the approaches to performance that typically involved convergent thought and teacher directed experiences. These conceptions of band as a laboratory of musical understanding served to limit the amount of teacher control within the classroom and instead promoted student voices.

Within each case, there were examples of teachers relinquishing control to varying degrees. By asking divergent questions, Mr. Porter helped his students toward multiple musical possibilities and encouraged their own individual ownership over their musical understanding. Mr. Stevens manifested a focus on students taking charge of their own learning through the implementation of creative musical activities in a collaborative setting. Mr. Vance strongly believed that he can learn from his students just as much as they can learn from him. This approach dismantled barriers that excluded opportunities for student thought and action within their music learning.
Summary of the Role of Band

Power can take many forms within music education, from the external forces seeking to impact curriculum on a macro level to the individual philosophies and practices of music educators to enact curriculum on a micro level. In this section, I examined the role of power within both contexts, and considered what meanings could be drawn for the specific cases of this study. The current struggles of curricular control at the federal, state, and local levels can have a significant impact on the teaching and learning within a music classroom. Enacting laws that prohibit the discussion of “divisive concepts” (NAfME Divisive Concepts Laws Town Hall, 2022) might force music educators to avoid selecting repertoire by diverse voices and prohibit students from freely discussing and expressing elements of their identity. Music educators can, and must, find a way to flex against the parameters of curricular control to find spaces for genuine expression through creative musical activities. The music educators serving as participants for this study each found a way to subvert external forces on their programs to include creative musical activities.

Within the individual music programs of each site, the teacher participants purposefully and methodically broke down barriers traditionally ascribed to the teacher-student power dynamic. The teacher participants promoted student autonomy and voice among their students through enacting composition activities. Some examples involved Mr. Porter remaining in the front of the ensemble but encouraging divergent thought among the students, while others (Mr. Vance) treated the ensemble as a type of laboratory for musical understanding and actively sought out ways to include students’ individual approaches to music-making. Regardless of the specific context, music educators must advocate for their students in regard to external forces seeking curricular control as well as internal structures that promote autocratic styles of teaching. In the following section, I will present findings on the role of the teacher during the composition
activities, specifically focusing on how they sought to dismantle the power dynamic between teacher and students.

The Role of the Teacher

The way in which teachers approach the composition process can have a significant impact on the power dynamic between teachers and students, and the creative products that result. In this section, I will present each teacher participant’s approach during the composition activities in their classrooms. Their approaches will be presented through teacher interviews, student focus group interviews, and observation data. Following, I will examine intersections with relevant scholarship, including the themes of “leader vs. facilitator,” the role of dialogism, and encouraging risk-taking during the composition process.

Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School

The eighth grade band student participants in the focus group interview at Walberg Middle School described Mr. Porter’s role during the composition process. “Breaking it up step by step, and coming over to help us individually,” is how Luka described the way in which Mr. Porter approached the composition activity. He went on to say, “[Mr. Porter] would help us dissect the section as a group, then take about four or five minutes to help us problem solve.” Chad agreed, stating, “He would walk around and help, but he would give us freedom to do our own thing. Not just give us sheet music and say ‘do this’ but he would give us ideas of what might work well.” The students made it clear that Mr. Porter offered guidance but was not prescriptive in his feedback in a way that would limit the potential musical solutions to the composition activity.

In defining his role in the composition activity, Mr. Porter said, “Guide. And facilitator. But guide was the first that came to mind.” He described how he aimed to guide students toward new musical possibilities that often involved multiple potential paths. Through analysis of
observation data, the way in which Mr. Porter achieved this level of guiding students toward multiple solutions was done through asking divergent questions. These divergent questions included examples such as, “How might you develop that idea? How could that idea be different the second time?” Questions like these would elicit multiple responses from students, both in terms of verbal explanations of their musical ideas as well as playing their instruments to “develop” the ideas through improvisation.

In considering his role further, Mr. Porter added that he considers himself “A cheerleader as well. Helping kids feel successful. Hopefully help motivate them to continue, to keep going and develop learner agency.” Here, Mr. Porter focused on the motivational influence that a teacher’s presence and type of feedback can have on student progress. For example, in a saxophone lesson, a student’s composition included a particular moment of expressive playing and motivic development. Mr. Porter congratulated the student on their creative work and excitedly ran to the piano to accompany their composition.

Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy

The student participants in the seventh grade band student focus group interview at Skylerville Academy described Mr. Stevens’s role in their sound composition activity. As the activity involved students conducting a group of their peers in performing their own sound composition, the act of conducting became a significant part of their preparation. Jack said that Mr. Stevens’s role was “To give us feedback, and to show us how to conduct. It’s a huge part. If we didn’t know about conducting or about music, we wouldn’t be able to be successful with this.” This student attributed his success to the instruction provided by Mr. Stevens.

The student participants in the eighth grade band student focus group also provided their insight into the role that Mr. Stevens played in the video game soundtrack activity. Layla said, “[Mr. Stevens] tells us what we’re doing wrong. He makes suggestions within this freedom, and
he gives us examples of what to do instead.” The particular use of the word “freedom” by Layla was striking, and the eighth grade students acknowledged that the composition activity allowed for a significant amount of freedom to be creative within the parameters set by Mr. Stevens. Ryan added that, “[Mr. Stevens] tries to say ‘you can do this’ to make it better. He takes into account what you’re trying to make. He makes a suggestion to help you improve. It’s like getting a professional’s advice.” Similar to the students in the seventh grade band focus group interview, the eighth grade students consider Mr. Stevens a musical expert and appreciate the feedback that he provides.

When asked how he defined his role in the composition process, Mr. Stevens replied, “Facilitator, or curator. Someone who is modeling and demonstrating how to go about composing.” This was evidenced in observations of the composition activities, particularly the eighth grade video game soundtrack activity, when Mr. Stevens would model how to improvise and create a cohesive musical idea that matched the actions in the video. He was explicit with how he was approaching the activity, what chords and scales he was basing his improvisation on, and what types of other musical material (other video games, movie soundtracks, etc.) he was pulling from. Going further, Mr. Stevens said, “I try to present multiple sides of the process. I kind of show them different genres, I try to bring in different composers.” Connecting to what the seventh and eighth grade students said in their focus group interviews, Mr. Stevens offered a variety of musical perspectives that students could draw from in their compositions. “I’m more of a coach, to try and coach them through and find their personal best,” Mr. Stevens added. Similar to Mr. Porter, Mr. Stevens considered the motivational influence of his role during the composition process by offering positive reinforcement and celebrating student success.

Mr. Vance – Effington High School
In the concert band focus group interview, Jamie offered insight into how students view Mr. Vance’s role in the riff building activity. “He’s setting up the rules for us to work around, but besides that he leaves it up to us to figure it out.” Here, Mr. Vance is described as setting parameters for the students to work within, and allowing students the freedom to create what they wish. During the wind ensemble focus group interview, Chelsea said, “[Mr. Vance] will lead us to where we need to know what to do, and select students to take it over. He’ll have students each make up a part and put them together. He’s more of a suggester.” This transition of power from teacher to student was also found through analyzing observation data of the riff building activity.

In describing his role during the composition activities, Mr. Vance said that he provided parameters on the executive skills needed to be successful, such as playing with appropriate posture, characteristic tone, and a steady pulse. He also said that he did not make value judgements of students’ artistic creations. Mr. Vance said that the main questions that inform his interference during the activities are, “Is everyone participating? Does everyone have a voice?” If a student was not participating, he would become involved, either through moving closer to the student or verbally checking in on them. In terms of students having a voice, Mr. Vance aimed to provide democratic practices that fostered equal involvement from all students. This included the fact that all students were improvising at the start of the riff building activity, and the Google Classroom random student selector chose students to share their creative riffs.

Similar to Mr. Porter and Mr. Stevens, Mr. Vance was cognizant of his influence on student motivation during the activity.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

The question of when and how to offer feedback during composition activities has been explored by many authors. In this section, I will explore relevant scholarship regarding the role
of the teacher during composition activities. In particular, the role of the teacher as leader or facilitator will be presented, followed by the role of dialogism within the creative musical process. Next, I will consider how teachers can approach encouraging musical risk-taking during composition activities. Intersections between the interview and observational data will be illuminated to provide a unique view of the particular practices of the three teacher participants in this study.

“Leader vs. Facilitator”

In his dissertation, Allsup (2002) described the oscillating role of the teacher between that of a leader and a facilitator within democratic and mutual learning contexts. In order to promote democratic practices in ensemble settings, the teacher should become more of a facilitator and allow the specific path of the creative musical activity to be dictated by the students. Similarly, Cremin et al. (2006) found that the teacher action of “standing back” was effective in promoting individual agency through the creative process. “Standing back” includes observing students’ creative behaviors, allowing them the time and space to create freely, and acknowledging each students’ individual level of agency during the activity.

This distinction of “leader vs. facilitator” held true in each case for this study. In Mr. Porter’s classroom at Walberg Middle School, the students described his actions as walking around the room and providing feedback, but allowing the “freedom” to create on their own. Mr. Porter described himself as a “guide” during the composition process, and data from observations of rehearsals and small group lessons revealed his ability to guide students toward new and varied musical solutions to the composition activity.

Similarly, the eighth grade band students at Skylerville Academy described Mr. Stevens’s actions during the video game soundtrack activity as that of a facilitator, walking around the room to provide feedback when needed, and making suggestions for students on their
compositions. Mr. Stevens also described his own role as that of “facilitator” during these activities, although he also provided a model of how students can approach the process of improvisation for their compositions. These multiple roles of model and facilitator are similar to those of “leader vs. facilitator” described by Allsup (2002).

Mr. Vance’s students described his role as setting up the parameters of the activity then passing control over to the students. Mr. Vance described his own role similarly, adding that he is guided by making sure every student is participating and has an equal voice in the creative process. The parameters that he provided included the tonal center, the meter, the appropriate length of the “riffs,” and the specific executive skills needed by the students to play their instruments in a characteristic and appropriate manner. The way in which Mr. Vance chose to “stand back” (Cremin et al., 2006) was purposeful in order to allow students the freedom to explore within the parameters.

The three teacher participants in this study were aware of the significance of teacher input during the creative process. While a common structure of large ensemble rehearsals consist of the teacher standing in the front of the room holding the students’ attention, this disparity in power was significantly neutralized during each composition activity. Mr. Porter behaved more as a collaborator in the creative process with his students. Mr. Stevens modeled appropriate ways in which students could approach the improvisation and composition process, and provided feedback to students in ways that suggested potential solutions. Mr. Vance provided the parameters for his students to work within, and offered limited suggestions as students shared their creative riffs. None of these approaches involved providing students with singular answers to the musical problem, but rather the teachers’ involvement provided guidance in line with the parameters set in place and a divergent approach to the multitude of musical responses to the compositional problems put forth. The role of facilitator of the creative process involves setting
appropriate parameters and offering guidance only when necessary, not in a dictatorial manner. The transfer of power from teacher to student during the compositional process can be a frightening concept for some teachers, but the teacher participants in this study unabashedly handed the reigns over to their students and facilitated only when necessary.

**Dialogism**

The goal of dialogic discourse is to consider multiple and varied perspectives together. Put another way, “Dialogism is a process of constant renewal and emergence of new possibilities” (Spruce, 2021, p. 109). Conversely, monologism involves the dissemination of one perspective to many empty vessels (Freire, 1970), an environment consisting of “the Master, the tradition, the literature and its codes” (Allsup, 2016, p. 83). Creative musical activities are particularly suitable for dialogic discourses as they involve participatory music making and musical decisions being negotiated among multiple individuals. “Participatory creativity as a process of invention and innovation centred around the development of ideas that are generated by a diverse network of actors, each of whom contributes to the idea development process in unique and varied ways” (Clapp, 2017, p. 45).

As Spruce (2021) noted, “key to the effectiveness of these classroom interactions is the teacher’s mediation of the social relations within the class supporting each child’s right to participate and ensuring their voices – both musical and spoken – are heard” (p. 114). Musically creative activities can allow individuals the power to offer their unique musical, social, and cultural perspectives in dialogue with their peers. While the teacher participants in this study each approached the negotiation of power differently, they all served to mediate the social structure of the classroom. Mr. Porter was the most involved in the social mediation during the small group lessons. During these lessons, he aimed to promote divergent thinking through open-ended questions and sought to enter into genuine dialogue with the eighth grade band students.
Mr. Stevens was less involved in each group’s social interactions, but he purposefully transferred this power of social mediator to the students in order to promote dialogic discourse. He also scaffolded the composition activities through the use of worksheets with questions that focused students’ attention toward the most important compositional elements to discuss. Mr. Vance described how he asks the question, “Does everyone have a voice?” through the compositional process. Within the full group setting, Mr. Vance sought to encourage discussion of the manipulation of musical elements in order to create riffs and build a composition in a collaborative setting. In each case, the teacher participants promoted “constant renewal and emergence of new possibilities” (Spruce, 2021, p. 109) through a focus on dialogic discourse.

**Encouraging Risk-Taking**

In order to allow for individual creativity to occur unencumbered by fear of failure, teachers must also encourage students to take musical risks during the creative process. To help foster creative agency development among students, Jónsdóttir (2017) suggested teachers transfer power to their students “by supporting possibility thinking and nurturing an ethos of engagement, experimentation, and risk-taking” (Jónsdóttir, 2017, p. 131). Jónsdóttir went on to share that scaffolding appropriate remedial creative musical activities is also of crucial importance.

As stated previously, Mr. Porter implemented multiple creative musical activities during the academic year leading up to the composition activity that I observed. He also called himself a “cheerleader” for his students, offering praise and genuine excitement when students successfully weaved together creative musical ideas into an expressive musical composition. These roles that Mr. Porter played, according to Jónsdóttir (2017), were essential for promoting his students’ levels of individual creative agency over the process.
Mr. Stevens considered himself a “coach” in the compositional process, while his students considered him a “professional.” His role during the composition process oscillated between that of model and that of guide, and he was deliberate with when he fulfilled each. By helping his students “find their personal best,” as he described it, Mr. Stevens promoted students being in charge of their own learning and exploring musical possibilities without focusing their energies toward one possible musical solution.

Mr. Vance provided parameters for his students to work within, and he transferred power from himself to his students once the parameters of the activity were in place. When asked what approaches help to ease students’ nerves during the composition activities, wind ensemble student Chelsea responded, “Playing altogether helps a lot with nerves. Or giving us stupid nicknames based on our parts, it lightens the mood a lot.” Humor can be used as a tool to neutralize the tension and fear of failure during a creative musical activity, and Mr. Vance utilized humor throughout the riff building activity for that very purpose.

Providing appropriate prerequisite creative musical experiences and the subsequent freedom to create whatever they would like within the appropriate parameters is necessary to encourage risk taking. The process of empowering students through appropriate scaffolded creative musical experiences and genuine praise of their creative work is essential in creative musical activities, especially with regard to young instrumentalists who may not have explored composing yet.

Summary of the Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is crucial to the success or failure of a creative musical activity, and the specific aspect of the negotiation of power between teacher and student is particularly important. In this section, I presented data from teacher interviews, student focus group interviews, and observations of composition activities regarding the role of the teacher and how
power was negotiated and shared between teacher and student in each case. Following, I examined relevant scholarship pertaining to the role of the teacher during creative musical activities. Allsup (2002) and Cremin et al. (2006) suggested that when teachers act more as a facilitator rather than a fearless leader, the possibility emerges for shared power and the development of student ownership over the musical structures being created. Spruce (2021) pointed toward creative musical activities as being ripe for dialogic practices which promote “constant renewal and emergence of new possibilities” (Spruce, 2021, p. 109). Jónsdóttir (2017) described how the importance of appropriate prerequisite creative musical activities, as well as nurturing risk-taking behaviors within music, can help students overcome the fear of failure with creative musical activities. By offering appropriate prerequisite creative musical experiences to scaffold their knowledge of musical creativity, focusing students’ attention toward the multitude of musical solutions to the compositional activity, and providing the space for students to enter into discussions on equal footing as the teacher and their peers, the amount of instructional power that is typically held by the teacher is redistributed among students and teachers in a more equitable fashion, and encourages students to become a partner or collaborator in the creative process. In the following section, I will explore the specific voices of students from each case of this study.

Voices of Students

Regardless of a teacher’s perceived role in the creative musical process, the level of significance an activity has on their students can only be found through hearing from the students themselves. In this section, I will first present the voices of students from each case. Specifically, the findings I will share here involve students’ perspectives of the particular composition activities within their band class, including their most enjoyable experiences and their perceptions of the most significant aspects of the composition activities. Next, I will present
relevant scholarship with regard to two emergent themes: shared goals and deep participation. Intersections between relevant scholarship and students’ voices will be examined through these themes.

Students of Walberg Middle School

The eighth grade band students in the focus group interview at Walberg Middle School shared their thoughts on the composition activities in band. Chad said that his favorite aspect was the social connections he makes with his peers through the process of learning, creating, and performing music. “It’s definitely the bonds you make with people, the social element,” Chad said. He also referenced how the COVID-19 pandemic had hindered these social experiences in the previous school year, and the excitement to meet as an ensemble in person during the current school year.

Specifically concerning the composition activity, Luka described the way in which a focus on creative music making helped him listen to music differently. “If I hear a beat, I’ll be like, ‘Here’s this, here’s that.’ I can dissect it and say, ‘There’s this going on’ and it’s pretty cool.” Chad also described the impact of the composition activities on his ability to listen. “I’ll listen to music and realize if it’s a chorus and dissect it and figure out how it’s put together.” He went on to specify that he specifically listened for chords and harmonic progressions in music, and he used his musical knowledge to transfer hearing the harmonic progressions to playing them on piano. “I learned to play songs on piano, and it’s definitely helped me figure out the chords.” As evidenced through the student focus group interviews, Mr. Porter’s goal of deeper musical understanding through participation in creative musical activities was certainly evident in discussions with the eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School.

Students of Skylerville Academy
The student participants in the seventh grade band focus group interview at Skylerville Academy described their experiences with the sound composition activity within band. They noted the joy in playing their instruments and making music during the school day, as well as learning and performing various types of band music in concerts. Similar to the eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School, the seventh grade band students at Skylerville Academy agreed that they enjoyed collaborating with their peers in the various settings in band, from full ensemble rehearsals and performances to the small group collaborations during the sound composition activity. Jack said, “It’s not as fun playing by yourself.” Jack went on to describe how he enjoyed his experiences playing jazz the most, since “[In] concert band, the music can sometimes be boring. In jazz, the music is better, there are glissandos and you can play runs and stuff.” Jack was particularly motivated by experimenting with sound and finding the limits of the parameters set in place by Mr. Stevens.

Similar to the seventh grade band students, the eighth grade student participants in the eighth grade band focus group interview at Skylerville Academy named the collaborative nature of the composition process as being a major motivation. The students were also interested in the process of learning a new piece of music, and rehearsing it to uncover the specific musical structures that Mr. Stevens would point out, such as the rhythmic motives or the harmonic progressions. However, the aspect of performing as a small ensemble was the most important part of the experience, specifically the performance of student-created pieces of music. Tanya said, “You know when you’ve been working on a piece of music and it all comes together, and you feel warm and fuzzy?” The eighth grade band students pointed to their last band concert as an example of the power of performance, where they performed a specific piece which included student soloists and the lights being turned off. Sharing their creative musical works was
important to the eighth grade band students, as was the execution of previously written band works for public performance.

Students of Effington High School

The concert band student focus group interview at Effington High School revealed similar notions of motivation as compared with the band students of Walberg Middle School and Skylerville Academy. Notably, the shared experience of creating as an ensemble was key for multiple students in the focus group interview. Jamie said, “I like playing with friends. The different parts of band, working toward a common goal. Having the same brain as a group. Experiencing new pieces and playing them in different styles.” This particular focus on shared experiences toward a common goal was important for Jamie, as was the manipulation of previously written pieces of music toward new conceptions of the work.

For the wind ensemble students at Effington High School, the connections they have made with Mr. Vance were the most important aspects of their experiences in band. In describing this notion of connection between teacher and students, Vinny said, “One of my favorite parts of band is the connections we build between students and the director. [Mr. Vance] is a big part of the band. We can make a joke every once in a while and it’s enjoyable.” When asked about the power dynamic between Mr. Vance and the students during the creative musical activities, Vinny replied, “He allows us to be very open with him, and he gives us a lot of responsibility. He’s not just the dictator in charge.” Similar to the previous section describing the role of the teacher, Mr. Vance’s aim of transferring power from himself to every student in the classroom through creative musical activities was acknowledged by the wind ensemble students. Conversely, Chelsea pointed toward the performance aspects of band as having the greatest impact. “I love playing the pieces. It’s about playing actual pieces of music written by other people. We actually had one of our percussionists write a piece of music for us, for full band, that was pretty cool.”
However, it was interesting to note that immediately following this discussion, Chelsea said that she often improvises music at home on her band instrument. For Chelsea, the creative musical activities still held value and relevance, as did performing previously written works by others as an ensemble.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

The students at each site were eager to share their perspectives regarding the composition activities in which they participated in and how their experiences fostered their motivation to continue participation in creative musical activities. The voices of students brought forth two emergent themes: shared goals and deep participation in the creative process. In this section, I will examine students’ voices in relation to these two themes, presenting relevant scholarship and how they intersect with the voices of students.

**Shared Goals**

The notion of shared goals was a recurring theme among the student focus group interviews within each case of this study. Rusinek (2007) found that students preferred collaborative composition activities as compared to individual composing due, in part, to the shared responsibility and the shared goals among peers. Cross et al. (2012) described the notion of empathic creativity as encompassing the shared intentionality of a group of musicians, and that “music may act as a scaffold that can help us to acquire the habit of empathizing” (Cross et al., 2012, p. 340). Lage-Gomez and Cremades-Andreu (2020) also described the notion of shared goals as an aim of group creative music making, and particularly the creation of shared identity among peers.

In all three cases in this study, the students described the shared nature of the creative musical activities as one of the biggest impacts and motivations to create within the structure of band. The eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School described the social connections
as a “bond” between peers. Jack, a seventh grade band student from Skylerville Academy, said, “It’s not as fun playing by yourself.” As Tanya (eighth grade band student at Skylerville Academy) had said, the “warm and fuzzy” feeling of sharing your creative work is unparalleled. Jamie (concert band student from Effington High School) described being a member of the collaborative creative process in band as “Having the same brain as a group.” In each setting, there existed the unifying factor of shared goals (Rusinek, 2007) through collaboration with creative musical activities. This collaboration could foster empathic creativity (Cross et al., 2012) among students, as well as the creation of shared identity among the ensemble (Lage-Gomez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020). The fact that the shared goals of the creative process emerged from each of the focus group interviews with students points to the power of this particular theme.

**Deep Participation**

From one of the only empirical studies of creative agency within music education, Muhonen (2016) found the emergent theme of deep participation as being central to the development of creative agency. Deep participation, according to Muhonen, refers to the students’ musical skill development and their realizations of musical and creative agency. In other words, the combination of ability and the acknowledgement of that ability come together through deep participation in creative musical activities.

Each teacher participant within this study encouraged “deep participation” through the composition activities, with the particular goals of deeper musical understanding. Specifically, the aspects of experimentation and the influence of musical families and enjoyment of making music outside of school played a significant role in this process. The eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School identified specific musical abilities through listening to music outside of school, such as Luka describing how his ability to dissect a beat was influential in his
motivation to continue participating in the composition activities structured by Mr. Porter. A seventh grade band student at Skylerville Academy, Jack, described how he enjoyed the setting of jazz more than concert band since he was able to be challenged with his instrumental skills. Jamie, a concert band member at Effington High School, explained the process of learning a previously written piece of music but playing it in different styles, and how this process was motivational to continue developing musical understanding and pursuing creative musical activities. Due in part to the way in which teachers structure the particular creative musical activity (as described in Chapter IV) as well as the teachers’ abilities to encourage full participation from students (as described in Chapter V), this deep participation is a necessary step in the journey toward fostering creative musical agency among instrumentalists.

Summary of Voices of Students

In this section, I presented findings involving the voices of the students from each case with regard to their experiences with the composition activities. The themes of shared goals and deep participation revealed that regardless of the specific context and structure of the composition activity, the collaborative nature and the reliance on musical skills and knowledge are key experiences for the students. Each group of students described the notion of collaboration through the shared goals of the composition activity. The development of shared goals holds significance for these students because as they entered into a creative musical activity that promoted divergent thinking through music, they faced potential challenges in generating original musical ideas and the fear of failure in a social situation. However, they participated in these activities alongside their peers, and the collaborative nature of these composition activities allowed the opportunity to foster the communal sense of shared goals, shared identity as a group (depending on the size of the group of students working with each other), and empathy toward others in the creative process. These activities also fostered a deep level of participation through
building musical skill and understanding, and allowing for students to rely on that understanding and skill to work through the musical problem and arrive at a creative musical product. In the next section, I will examine the negotiation of power between teacher and student within the creative process.

“Where Does Power Reside?”

Within each case, I asked each teacher participant the same question: where does power reside in the composition process? The teacher participants each answered this question from their own philosophical perspectives, and revealed a variety of conceptions of the role of power. In this section, I will first present the teacher participants’ varied perspectives. Next, I will explore intersections of the teachers’ philosophical approaches with relevant scholarship, including works by Kanellopoulos (2015) and Katz-Buonincontro (2018). From these intersections, I will consider two aspects of the negotiation of power within creative musical activities: the ownership and authority over the creative process, and social justice perspectives of creativity.

**Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School**

When asked, “Where does power reside?” Mr. Porter replied that it should be with the teacher. This is due in part, according to Mr. Porter, because the teacher is “in the room” with the students on a daily basis, and they have an emic perspective that is invaluable to the music learning process. He believed that is also due to the fact that teachers are prepared with more musical knowledge compared to their students. “They’re counting on me, they’re too young to be making those decisions themselves. Like my eighth graders, they’re 13 and maybe 14 years old. They don’t know enough of the world to make a worldly decision.” Describing this topic further, Mr. Porter stated, “Most of the time, I have more musical knowledge than any of my students. I’ve worked really hard to develop that knowledge.” This notion of “teacher as expert” was
evidenced in observations of rehearsals and lessons as Mr. Porter shared his musical knowledge with his students, sometimes explaining complex compositional devices that students, perhaps inadvertently, employed in their compositions. Mr. Porter also connected his musical knowledge with the musical styles that students listened to outside of school.

I can comfortably say that I have more musical knowledge than all of my eighth graders when it comes to this music that they listen to, that is familiar to them, primarily Western European music, or popular music. I understand music better than they do. (Interview, April 12th, 2022)

With regard to the location of power, Mr. Porter considered the role of teacher expertise: “In helping them understand music, I guess the power does reside with me.”

Mr. Porter believed that while the teacher holds the power during the creative process, they must also be constantly learning and considering the cultural identities and contexts of their students.

I think that I need to be educated and knowledgeable enough to recognize my own bias, and perpetuation of marginalizing practices of foregrounding white, male, classical, Western European composers. That’s the tradition, and I need to recognize that, and evaluate if that’s best for the children in the room with me. Is that relevant to them? What is relevant to them? What do they want to learn about? How can I teach them to understand music? (Interview, April 12th, 2022)

As an example, Mr. Porter described how he led his students through a project earlier in the school year in which small groups of students arranged songs during the holidays. An option for the arrangement project was the use of holiday songs. Mr. Porter recognized that a majority of his students came from White, upper middle class, Christian families who celebrated Christmas.
I said, “If your family celebrates Christmas, and if you want to learn a Christmas tune, those are great tunes to learn I, IV, and V harmonies. I’ll help you with those. If anyone knows Jewish songs, or if you just want to find a pop song on the radio, all of that is fine.” But making space for that is my acknowledgement of the community expectation of public school. (Interview, April 12th, 2022)

The difficulty in navigating the cultural contexts was not lost on Mr. Porter. He said, “It’s tough, I think teaching is an art and it’s hard to balance all of those things.”

Mr. Porter was also interested in the utilization of power by the teacher. “How does it work for an English teacher teaching kids to write? Or an art teacher teaching kids to draw? Kind of the same, right? In either of those situations, the power is with the teacher.” Mr. Porter’s ideal use of power was through guiding and shaping students’ creativity, and he described this in terms of leading students down a path of discovery. “I would say it’s helping to identify a path that the kids are taking towards greater, deeper understanding, and helping them find things along that path that arise.” Mr. Porter provided an example of leading his child on a hike through the woods.

Is the purpose to get to the end of the hike? Or to learn things along the way? Or to learn about trees, the soil, or the indigenous people that lived here before? It’s up to the parent to pick the trail and keep the kids on the trail for the most part so everyone stays safe. But based on kids’ interests, and learner agency, what comes up, what are they interested in, and what do we discover along the way? (Interview, April 12th, 2022)

For Mr. Porter, the ideal use of power was based in guiding students on the path of discovery.

Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy

When asked, “Where does power reside?” Mr. Stevens replied, “I’m in charge of insulating the creative process and guiding them to it.” From this quote and observation data
collected during the composition activities at Skylerville Academy, Mr. Stevens assumed the role of one who creates the structure of the creative musical activities, and, most importantly, the parameters that the students are allowed to work within. These parameters involve the specific type of activity (e.g., improvisation or composition), the mode in which students will create (e.g., with acoustic instruments, or with technology, or both), and the guidelines for an appropriate creative product (e.g., a written composition or a public performance). The particular guideposts that Mr. Stevens provided in the sound composition and the video game soundtrack activities pointed his students toward the realm of potential musical solutions.

While Mr. Stevens believed that the teacher holds the power to “insulate the creative process,” he also delegated some of that power to his students so that they were allowed the freedom to work out their creative musical solutions within their groups. He said, “I try to give them the guidelines and constraints so that they can flex against them.” The act of exploring what is allowed within the constraints of the composition activity was left to the students, and the ways in which they flexed against these parameters fostered interesting and novel musical creations. As an example, during the eighth grade video game soundtrack activity, some groups composed melodic material that was securely within a specific harmonic structure and meter, which served as an accompaniment to the video that the group selected, or a type of non-diegetic music (a complementary sound that does not originate within a film). Meanwhile, other groups decided to compose primarily sound effects of the actions taking place within the video that they selected, which served as a type of diegetic music (sounds originating from within the film). The specific direction that the students decided to pursue with their compositions was completely up to them, and Mr. Stevens would only offer assistance within their chosen sonic worlds.

When introducing the structure of the composition activity, Mr. Stevens also utilized modeling to demonstrate the types of musical solutions that students could explore. Mr. Stevens
said, “In my projects, I like to set the stage and lay the framework and show them the bare minimum.” This “bare minimum” involved adherence to all of the parameters of the activity for which Mr. Stevens was assessing. Beyond that, the students had complete control. Mr. Stevens went on to say, “I make sure they’re following the parameters, but some students will take it and go as far as they can with it.” The particular direction that students go was left for the students to decide for themselves, resulting in a shared power structure between Mr. Stevens and his students.

Mr. Vance – Effington High School

When asked, “Where does power reside?” Mr. Vance replied, “Ultimately, I want them to make the musical decisions.” From interviews with Mr. Vance throughout my site visit and observational data of the riff building activity at Effington High School, Mr. Vance structured activities in a way that allowed for the greatest potential for student ownership over musically creative decisions, which left little room for him, as the teacher, to hoard power. For Mr. Vance, the power to make musical decisions was the only power that mattered within creative musical activities.

The transfer of power from teacher to student in order to make musical decisions was done primarily through asking divergent questions.

I try to phrase questions in an open-ended way. For example, I might say, “This four-bar phrase feels boring, we need to make some musical decisions for this phrase. Can you make some musical decisions for how this phrase should go?” (Interview, May 17th, 2022)

By directing students’ attention toward the multiple possibilities of musical expression, Mr. Vance handed over power to the students to generate original musical ideas. These opportunities for musical decision making occurred throughout the band curriculum and included many varied
contexts of music making. One example was earlier in the school year when Mr. Vance encouraged his students to perform a conductorless concert, where the band performed prewritten musical works without a conductor in front of them. The rehearsals included typical strategies for the ensemble to learn and express the musical works, but as the concert came closer, Mr. Vance stepped away from the podium and allowed students to explore how to navigate the performance of the works, including how to start and stop, how to uniformly stand up and bow, and how to respond to each other’s sounds.

Why would Mr. Vance shift power from himself to his students? “Once they leave the room, 99% of these students will not play their instruments. If every musical decision was made for them, they will fall flat on their face when they try to do it themselves.” Through scaffolded experiences of making musical decisions, Mr. Vance’s students were afforded opportunities to build their musical understanding as well as their confidence in asserting their musical thoughts on the creative process. Mr. Vance described an example of this in the Effington High School jazz band, where a trombonist was improvising a solo over blues in C. The student repeatedly played F-sharp, which does not fit neatly within the harmonic progression of blues in C. Instead of jumping in to correct the student’s choice to play a “wrong” note, Mr. Vance stood back and allowed the student time and space to come to the realization that F-sharp was not a pitch that sounded good when played repeatedly during C blues. By creating opportunities for students to make musical decisions, Mr. Vance was able to hand over power of the creative musical activity to the students and let their participation in the process guide them toward struggle or success.

Intersections with Relevant Scholarship

The teacher participants revealed that they conceived of the role and negotiation of power differently. Two particularly salient themes will be examined in this section. These themes include the aspect of ownership and authority over the creative process, as described by
Kanellopoulos (2015), as well as social justice perspectives, as described by Katz-Buonincontro (2018). Through exploring intersections between the teacher participants’ philosophical perspectives and the relevant scholarship, the varied approaches and meanings of power within the creative process will be considered.

Ownership and Authority

In describing elements that music educators should focus on to promote creative agency among their students, Kanellopoulos (2015) listed ownership and authority as two important areas to consider. Ownership involves forming and negotiating creative spaces, and considering how a musical idea can “belong” to a person. Within this study, the three teacher participants described their conceptions of how power was negotiated within the composition process. While each conception was varied, the teacher participants were all responsible for creating the composition activity, including the parameters that were set in place. In each case, the creative space was formed by the teacher and negotiated between the teacher and their students.

The specificity of the parameters put in place by the teacher participants were varied and approached the concept of ownership over the musical ideas differently. For example, the eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School were allowed to explore only within the given tonal centers and meter, creating within the strict parameters of “big beat chord tones” over a given harmonic progression. Meanwhile, the seventh and eighth grade band students at Skylerville Academy were free to explore any sound world that they desired, including a variety of tonal centers and meters, as well as advanced techniques on their instruments and sound effects to match the video that their group selected. The students at Skylerville Academy were afforded the opportunity to select from a wide variety of potential musical solutions. While the specific parameters varied, each creative setting encouraged a deeper sense of personalization and ownership over the musical material through varying means.
Authority refers to realizing who is controlling the creative actions and why (Kanellopoulos, 2015). The teacher participants’ perspectives on authority made it clear that they each believe in different levels of control over the creative actions, and for varying reasons. For example, Mr. Porter believed that he was the musical expert in the classroom and that it was his duty to help guide the students toward creative musical solutions. Meanwhile, Mr. Vance believed that he should not hold the power to decide what is creative or not in the classroom, stating, “I will not grade your art.” These varying levels of authority illustrate just how different the philosophical approaches of each teacher participant were.

At Walberg Middle School, the power was held by the teacher and the teacher alone. This approach involved carefully scaffolded precursory creative musical activities that were deliberately planned. Conversely, Mr. Stevens at Skylerville Academy shared power between the teacher and students, with the teacher providing wide but appropriate musical parameters within which his students were to explore. At Effington High School, the power was held by the student musicians of the bands which allowed for deeply personal experiences and encouraged musical understanding through musical discovery. While each approach was different, they all aimed for student musical understanding and the development of learner agency through the creative process.

**Social Justice Perspectives**

In writing about the notion of creative agency, Katz-Buonincontro (2018) called for creativity as a human right. “Creativity as a human right in art education means supporting students to use the arts to examine and question their identity as well as their role in their school, communities, and society” (Katz-Buonincontro, 2018, p. 36). Focusing creative energies through social justice perspectives can help students authentically express their creative ideas freely.
Mr. Porter described his role in promoting a creative musical activity earlier in the school year from a place of cultural responsiveness. He encouraged students to arrange a song that they knew from a cultural tradition within which they identified, such as a Christmas, Hannukah, or other popular song. From this experience, he said, “[M]aking space for that is my acknowledgement of the community expectation of public school,” meaning he, and the families of the students that he taught, understood the role that cultural representation could play within the creative process. Mr. Porter also acknowledged that it was difficult to balance the needs of all students in terms of relevance and representation of musical styles, artists, and traditions, especially through creative musical activities.

Mr. Stevens did not explicitly state his belief in approaching creative musical activities with a social justice perspective, but the ways in which the activities were set up allowed space for students to authentically express themselves through the cultural examples that they identified with in the videos that they selected, as well as the sonic worlds that they composed within. In earlier chapters, I referenced how students at Skylerville Academy described their ability to compose based off of what they knew and the sound worlds that they had been exposed to prior to the composition activity. This acknowledgement of the source of their musically creative impulses demonstrates how the students were able to work within the parameters set by Mr. Stevens to express their cultural identities through their compositions.

Mr. Vance was particularly willing to promote social justice perspectives through musical creativity both in the band setting as well as the ukulele and songwriting class that he also taught. Through ensuring his classroom was a safe space for all students to be themselves and to express themselves freely, Mr. Vance allowed students to explore cultural, social, and musical contexts with which they personally identified. The riff building activity was brief and did not allow for an explicit connection to social or cultural topics, but Mr. Vance did make sure that every student
“had a voice” in the creative process, and that it was enacted in a truly democratic fashion. To varying degrees, each of the teacher participants in this study allowed for genuine cultural, social, and musical expression to occur.

Summary of “Where Does Power Reside?”

The teacher participants in this study had different views on the negotiation of power between teacher and student during the creative musical process. Despite these different perspectives, they were all tasked with setting the specific parameters of the composition activities, and deciding which specific musical contexts the composition activities would inhabit. The notion of authority, or the ownership over the creative process, was varied among the teacher participants. Mr. Porter maintained a significant portion of the ownership over his particular composition activity, allowing for some student freedom within the limited musical parameters. Mr. Stevens shared the power over the composition process with his students, as he saw himself as “insulating the creative process.” Mr. Vance transferred nearly all of the power to his students during the riff building activity, maintaining only the ability to select students with the Google Classroom random student selector. The free expression of musical ideas within the specific musical contexts and parameters of a creative musical activity should be the goal for every music educator. Affording students the ability to freely express themselves requires practical as well as philosophical foundations, including a safe classroom environment where students are free from judgement as well as a set of parameters that allows for an individual’s cultural identity to be genuinely expressed. These varied notions of ownership, authority, and social justice perspectives demonstrate the vastly different philosophical notions of musical creativity.
Summary of Power

Power holds many forms within creative musical activities, and this chapter explored many of these forms of power. The place that band held within the curricular structure of school and the autonomy that teachers had over their curriculum demanded that the teacher participants exert their power to include creative musical activities within their curricula. The power of experiences within the band classroom considered perspectives relating to the negotiation of power within traditional large ensemble structures (e.g., Allsup & Benedict, 2008) and the actions of the teacher participants that sought an alternative to these traditional approaches. The role of the teacher during composition activities involved the power exerted by the teacher over the students during the creative process, which brought forth the notions of “leader vs. facilitator” (Allsup, 2002), dialogic discourses (Spruce, 2021), and the act of encouraging risk-taking within the creative process (Jónsdóttir, 2017).

From listening to the voices of students who participated in composition activities, the importance of shared goals (Rusinek, 2007), empathy (Cross et al., 2012), and shared identity (Lage-Gomez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020) were brought to the fore. Finally, the philosophical perspectives of the teacher participants regarding the negotiation of power between themselves and their students during the composition activities revealed a variety of conceptions of how power is kept (Mr. Porter), shared (Mr. Stevens), or surrendered (Mr. Vance). The implications of these conceptions involves the locus of ownership and authority (Kanellopoulos, 2015) as well as social justice perspectives (Katz-Buonincontro, 2018) that foster genuine, individual expression through creative musical activities.

In Chapter IV, the particular actions of the teacher participants were presented, while in Chapter V the philosophical framework of teacher thought with regard to their actions was examined. The “what” and the “why” of the teacher participants set up the current chapter
regarding the role of power within the creative process. This chapter explored multiple perspectives of how power was conceived by the teacher participants and negotiated between them and their students. In the next chapter, the specific notion of agency development within composition activities will be explored.
Chapter VII
Agency

The notion of “agency” has been explored within educational research in general (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977), as well as music education research in particular (e.g., Wiggins, 2015). Building on the previous discussions of teacher action, teacher thought, and the role and negotiation of power within creative musical activities, this current chapter focuses on aspects of agency within the context of creative musical activities. Through the presentation of findings from interviews with teacher participants, student focus group participants, and observations, I will first discuss the role of parameters, including the notions of immersion and imagination. Next, I will examine the social considerations of agency within creative contexts, including outcomes of shared creative experiences as well as the importance of the classroom environment. Finally, I will present a new framework for creative musical agency development within instrumental music, based on the work of Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) as well as the discussions of findings and relevant scholarship from previous chapters.

The particular findings within the following sections (i.e., the role of parameters and social considerations) were influential in the creation of the new framework for creative musical agency development presented later in the chapter. Findings from teacher interviews and student focus group interviews, as well as observational data, provided a holistic view on the role of parameters during composition activities, and the specific structure of the parameters set by teacher participants and the ways in which student participants flexed against the parameters informed the notion of “composition activities as figured worlds” and “transforming creative
identity through experiences with composition activities,” respectively. Findings relating to the social considerations of sharing outcomes and the classroom environment also informed the new framework, specifically within the “social aspects” of “asserting creative identity within composition activities,” “composition activities as figured worlds,” and “transforming creative identity through experiences with composition activities.”

The Role of Parameters

When teachers introduce an assignment, the typical questions students ask will concern the expectations of the teacher and the limits of what is deemed appropriate within the assignment. A creative musical activity is extremely dependent on the particular parameters put in place during the activity’s inception; the only way to focus students’ musically divergent solutions is through a clear set of guidelines. These parameters might include the length of composition, the key center of the composition, or the programmatic nature of the composition, to name just a few of the countless possibilities. In this section, I will discuss the specific parameters implemented by each teacher participant for each composition activity. Next, I will examine relevant scholarship regarding “possibility thinking” (Burnard et al., 2006). Of particular importance are the notions of immersion and imagination, and I will describe how the parameters set by the teacher participants, as well as the compositional actions by their students, serve as examples of both immersion and imagination. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the particular structures of the parameters of composition activities as well as the ways in which students explore the limits of the parameters in these activities offered important insight into the role of creative musical agency. These notions will be illuminated in the new framework of creative musical agency presented later in the chapter.

Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School
The parameters that Mr. Porter created for the composition project included the following: sixteen measures in length; I, IV, and V7 in major tonality in a precomposed harmonic progression; in 4/4 time; and in the key of concert E-flat major. Mr. Porter also implemented the requirement that students’ compositions must be written down using standard notation. The musical elements that were left up to the students included specific rhythms and pitches. However, pitch choice was within the understanding of “big beat chord tones” where a chord tone is played on a beat when the harmony changes, or on strong pulses of the measure such as beat one and beat three in 4/4 time, based on Developing Musicianship Through Improvisation (Azzara & Grunow, 2010).

Much of the instruction during the small group lessons that I observed involved Mr. Porter listening to students’ composition progress and offering specific feedback that guided students toward the “big beat chord tones” parameter. In a follow-up interview four months after the initial observations, Mr. Porter described the difficulty of students developing musical ideas within these parameters.

These ideas developed over months. Some were able to write them down with some success. Most were not, most of them kind of played around with very basic ideas, and they kind of stuck with those same ideas, and kind of developed them over a period of months. (Interview, August 25th, 2022)

Despite the fact that some students were “stuck” on basic musical ideas and unable to embellish them in a meaningful way, Mr. Porter believed that the composition activity was a success.

This was the first step, and they did what they could do. I didn’t have very many kids not do anything. They all tried, they all moved toward greater musical understanding. So, to that end, the product of greater musical understanding, I think that was quite successful. (Interview, August 25th, 2022)
The students of the Walberg Middle School eighth grade band described how they worked within the parameters of the composition activity. Chad said, “I don’t know if it’s a wrong note all the time, but I do sometimes,” referring to the parameter of “big beat chord tones.” Luka agreed, stating, “A lot of times I go with whatever sounds right.” When asked how these parameters impacted their musical understanding, Chad said, “When you compose something yourself, you can really understand what it means.” During a small group saxophone lesson, I observed a student exploring the possibilities of rhythmic and pitch complexity within the parameters of “big beat chord tones” by playing an arpeggiated sequence outlining the harmonic progression. The student was using a wider range of the instrument compared to other students that I observed, and was trying to “fit in” as much music within the given parameters as possible.

Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy

The parameters that Mr. Stevens provided for the seventh grade students in their sound compositions included the following: using only three spoken sounds (“Whoosh,” “Ding,” and “Boom”) and no use of band instruments; students must each create their own individual composition using graphic notation to delineate the volume and duration of each sound, with student-created symbols representing each of the three sounds; and students must conduct their composition for a small group of students who will not be able to see the composition. The musical elements that were up to the students included the order, volume, and duration of the sound effects, as well as their specific conducting gestures to elicit the appropriate sound.

The parameters that Mr. Stevens set for the eighth grade band students in their video game soundtrack compositions included the following: the student must compose music for the entire duration of the video (typically between one minute and 90 seconds); the composition must include a tempo marking, a time signature on the first line, and a clef and key signature on
all of the lines; proper number of beats per measure; sync one or more of their sounds with specific actions within the video; and dynamics and articulations. The elements left up to the students to decide included which group of students to work with, the specific video they chose, the particular elements within the video to base their compositions on, if their composition would be comprised of melodic material or sound effects or both, and the specific roles each student would have in their group (e.g., melody and sound effects, or improviser and composer).

Mr. Stevens described how he managed the collaborative element of the composition activities, stating that he implemented a rule that students would work in groups for short periods of time. “Rarely will they do one activity for more than 10 to 15 minutes. I try to think like a middle schooler,” he said. Sometimes, when required, he would assign students to work in particular groups if there were social or behavioral concerns, but for the most part, students were able to self-select their groups. In describing the amount of student autonomy students had over the musical elements of these activities, Mr. Stevens said, “I think our profession is going toward student autonomy anyway,” and that he might as well give them the freedom to create.

The students in the seventh grade band focus group interview described how they managed their compositions within the parameters. They first described the three specific sounds they were allowed to work with, and how they were allowed to include more sounds in the precursory activity involving the creation of a sound composition reminiscent of a thunderstorm. Jack said, “Before we did a rainstorm activity with rain sounds and thunder sounds. It wasn’t like you had to stick with a certain sound. Here we have to stick with these specific sounds.” The seventh grade band student participants agreed that they did not enjoy the parameter involving no use of musical instruments. Jack went on to say, “I like the freedom, and I wish I played my instrument. I just like playing my instrument.” Conversely, Layla, an eighth grade band student,
was content with the way in which Mr. Stevens allowed the eighth grade students freedom to compose however they saw fit.

**Mr. Vance – Effington High School**

The parameters that Mr. Vance provided for the Effington High School concert band and wind ensemble students included the following: students must use their band instruments; they must sit in a circle and not use music stands; and they must improvise a four-beat “riff” in the given key and meter. The musical elements that the students were allowed to select included the specific rhythms and pitches within the four-beat riff, and for the “sound board” student conductor, the particular volume levels and timed entrances of each riff within the band.

Mr. Vance described how he also aimed to have the students focus on everyday expectations of playing with appropriate posture, characteristic tone, and a steady pulse. When asked why he provided the particular parameters of the riff building activity, Mr. Vance said, “Limitations help them with their initial exploration into creativity.” This referred to the specific key and meter of the riff building activity, and how it was introduced through a call and response activity during the warm-up process. Mr. Vance believed that more strict parameters “empowers them so it’s more of an even playing field. Everyone is working with the same tools. It’s all in how they utilize those tools to get to a product.”

When asked how he handles situations when students try to extend past the parameters he put in place, Mr. Vance said that it is a “case-by-case basis” and that he needs to understand why the student is trying to push against a particular parameter. As an example, he described a theme and variations composition project that he implemented a few years prior, and how one student wanted to write his composition for full band. Mr. Vance said that this particular student had a very limited musical background and certainly did not have the prerequisite knowledge or musical understanding to appropriately compose a full band arrangement, but he also did not
want to discourage the student’s interest in pursuing a more challenging musical task. Instead, Mr. Vance guided the student toward writing a melody and bass line for his theme and variations composition. The act of including a bass line was enough of a musical challenge for this particular student, and provided a safe and appropriate structure for that student to work within.

Throughout the riff building activity with each band, Mr. Vance said repeatedly “simplicity works.” When I asked him why he focused students’ attention toward keeping their riffs simple, Mr. Vance said that many high school students are trying to get “noticed,” and many times that results in exploring riffs that demonstrate how technically demanding of a musical idea they can play. As an example, there were multiple clarinet players who played riffs including sixteenth note figures, and Mr. Vance described their actions as “trying to prove their worth with how many notes they can fit into a one-bar riff.” He started the riff building activity with a simple call and response activity based on the “stomp-stomp-clap” rhythm of the beginning of Queen’s *We Will Rock You*. Mr. Vance referred to this rhythm as “the simplest rhythm in the world” in order to have his students start their musical ideas with simple rhythms first. Mr. Vance added that he often tells his students to use the “K.I.S.S.” method, which he defined as “Keep It Stupid Simple.”

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**

Burnard et al. (2006) defined “possibility thinking” within creative settings as involving the posing of questions, play, immersion, innovation, risk-taking, being imaginative, self-determination, and intentionality. The way in which students explore the creative process within the stated parameters encourages many of these elements, and two particular elements will be explored in this section: immersion and imagination. Through examining relevant scholarship and its intersections with findings from this study, I will elucidate the elements of fostering immersion and flexing against parameters through the use of imagination.
**Fostering Immersion**

Cremin et al. (2006) defined immersion within possibility thinking as involving the act of students being engaged “in playful activities without interruption, developing both questions and self-determination in the process of finding and solving problems” (p. 115). Each teacher participant of this study created specific parameters for the composition activities with their students for particular reasons, one reason being the hope of fostering immersion with the creative musical activity. Mr. Porter described how some of his students developed their musical ideas over the course of months. While many were not able to accurately notate their compositions, Mr. Porter was encouraged by their ability to create novel musical ideas within the parameters of “big beat chord tones.” He discussed the fact that this was his students’ first foray into creative musical activities and how their limited experience also limited their potential progress. When asked if he would change the way in which he approached this activity, Mr. Porter said,

> I’m not sure that doing it differently would have led to more understanding, possibly a better performance, but not necessarily more understanding. I feel like I took the time that I needed to take with the students where they were and push them as far as they were mentally willing to go. (Interview, August 25th, 2022)

This immersion within the musical structures of meter, harmonic progressions, improvisation, and composition fueled the eighth grade band students through this composition activity, and led to significant progress with Mr. Porter’s ultimate goal of deeper musical understanding.

Mr. Stevens described how he approaches the collaborative composition process with his students, particularly the length of time he allows them to work within their groups. The “small chunks” of time that he dedicated to group composing within rehearsals was scheduled and implemented in a deliberate manner. These breakout-type activities always occurred after a full
band warm-up process where Mr. Stevens would review the parameters of the composition activity and reiterate his expectations of students working in groups. The 10 to 15 minutes that students were allowed to work helped to hone their attention toward the task at hand, something Hopkins (2015) also described as being crucial to the success of a collaborative composition activity. These targeted allotment of time for group composition fostered immediate immersion in the activity.

Mr. Vance described how structuring creative musical activities with strict parameters fosters a safe environment for students to find immediate success and motivation to continue creating. The limited options for students to begin their creative musical journeys provides “an even playing field” with everyone “working with the same tools,” as Mr. Vance stated. The way in which Mr. Vance introduced the riff building activity involved call and response warm-up structures that he often employed within full band rehearsal. However, these “anti-consy” activities led directly to the type of musical structures allowed within the riff building activity. How students utilized their musical tools at their disposal determined the level of novelty of their musical product. By offering a scaffolded approach and a slim window of musical possibilities, Mr. Vance fostered immediate immersion into the riff building activity.

Using Imagination to Flex Against Parameters

While immersion in a creative musical activity involves full focus and concentration within the musical structures of the activity, imagination involves divergent thinking and the exploration of numerous potential solutions to the musical problem posed. One particular eighth grade saxophone student at Walberg Middle School demonstrated how she was able to flex against the parameters set by Mr. Porter, particularly the “big beat chord tones.” In her composition, she performed an arpeggiated sequence outlining the harmonic progression of the improvisatory section of Adventure Road and pushed the limits of the range of the instrument
and the rapidness of landing on a chord tone on each big beat. There was a significant amount of imagination needed for that student to keep exploring the potential musical possibilities until arriving at her chosen composition.

During the eighth grade video game soundtrack activity, students in the Skylerville Academy eighth grade band were given the freedom to choose their own videos to base their compositions on. Some students searched outside of the parameter of the videos provided by Mr. Stevens, instead electing to use other videos that they found more relevant to their lives. When working in groups on their compositions, students would often self-select their role within the group. Some of these roles included being the composer of melodic material vs. sound effects based on the actions of the video. The eighth grade band student focus group interview revealed these roles within groups and how students sought equal participation through separate musical duties. These students were flexing against the parameters provided by Mr. Stevens through their imaginative implementation of individual as well as group autonomy.

Mr. Vance described how high school students typically want to become “noticed,” and that they achieve this during creative musical activities by trying to create the most technically demanding melodic figures. I observed multiple clarinet players explore the limits of their technique during the riff building activity, and how they navigated the creation of “how many notes they can fit into a one-bar riff,” as Mr. Vance described. These demanding approaches to flexing against the parameters of a four-beat musical composition were imaginative in their own right.

Summary of the Role of Parameters

When structuring creative musical activities, one of the most crucial elements is the formation of boundaries for students to work within. These parameters can dictate the creative products that result, and the type of journey through the creative process. By structuring
composition activities with specific parameters, each teacher participant aimed for a deep level of immersion from their students, resulting in focused work on their compositions and motivation to continue composing. The particular use of imagination by many students within each band demonstrated the varied ways in which students can work to flex against these parameters and seek novel and meaningful musical creations. Through immersion and imagination, students are afforded the potential to develop creative musical agency. In the following section, I will present the social considerations of creative musical agency, including the role of dialogism, the shared experiences of creativity, and the classroom environment needed to foster creative agency.

**Social Considerations**

While there are many approaches to composition activities, from individual compositions to full ensemble compositions, each approach includes specific social considerations. The classroom environment within which students collaboratively compose, the expectations that teachers place on the social interactions between students during the composition process, and the way in which student compositions are shared and performed are all under the umbrella of social considerations within this study. In this section, I will first present data regarding the varied social considerations within each case from interviews with teacher participants, student focus group participants, and observations. Next, I will examine relevant scholarship, with particular focus on the benefits of emergent creative products (Sawyer, 2000), leadership roles (Lapidaki et al., 2012), the possibility of information exchange and multidimensional understanding (Colón León, 2020), the potential for shared intentionality (Cross et al., 2012), and considerations surrounding intercultural creativities (Burnard, 2015). The discussion that results from the intersections of data and relevant scholarship will reveal the importance of particular social considerations for composition activities within instrumental music settings, which will be
present within the new framework of creative musical agency development presented later in the chapter.

Mr. Porter – Walberg Middle School

When asked what type of conditions he provided his students during the composition activity, Mr. Porter said, “I try to provide an autonomy supported environment.” He explicitly referenced the work of Ryan and Deci (2017) with regard to their Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) within Self Determination Theory (SDT). “Need-supportive environments facilitate the development of integrated self-regulation” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 9), and this notion of self-regulation is a crucial element of the basic psychological need of autonomy. Mr. Porter went on to describe the conditions that he sought to create, including “Giving choice, helping things be relevant, helping kids be successful, helping to provide a rationale for why things are happening.” As mentioned previously, Mr. Porter believed that allowing time and space for students to work out their creative ideas should be encouraged, similar to an English teacher allowing students time to read or work on creative writing on their own.

Specifically concerning his ideal classroom environment to promote agency among his students, Mr. Porter said that ideally, the students would take initiative to be in charge of their own learning. However, he added that, “They can’t do anything independently, I’m discovering.” Mr. Porter provided the example of his seventh grade jazz band and how the students would not want to explore other musical works on their own outside of rehearsals. “I can’t motivate someone to do anything. I can provide the conditions for them.”

When I asked the eighth grade band student participants in the focus group interview what they specifically found helpful, Chad said, “It’s really helpful to work in small group lessons, and once you feel confident in your own part, you can branch out and add more to it.” For this particular student, the support of creating musical ideas within the security of small
group lessons provided an important sense of safety and security. In the follow-up interview four months after my initial observations, Mr. Porter described how his students were reluctant to share their creative musical ideas with others in a performance setting. “They were timid. … Their sound felt a little bit timid. Was that fearful? Was that uncertainty? Was that lack of confidence? I’m not quite sure” (Interview, August 25th, 2022). Since the students had limited experiences with creative musical activities prior, the specific reason that Mr. Porter found the students to be timid could be any of the ones he mentioned.

**Mr. Stevens – Skylerville Academy**

I asked Mr. Stevens what he noticed about how his students handle the sharing of their creative musical works. He said that most students are excited to share, and that if a student is nervous about sharing their work, he does not force them. The seventh grade band student, Jack, agreed, stating that his favorite and least favorite part of the composition activities is performing them. “It’s anticipation and it can be scary but exciting to share your ideas.”

In regard to the ideal classroom environment for each composition activity to foster agency among his students, Mr. Stevens described it as context dependent. “It depends on the goal of the activity,” Mr. Stevens said. As an example, during the seventh grade sound composition, he found it best for students to be “goofy and loud,” as this was an indication that they were motivated by the activity. Conversely, during the eighth grade video game soundtrack activity, Mr. Stevens found it more appropriate for students to be “studious,” quietly working within their groups, which indicated that they were “taking the activity seriously.” Regardless of the specific creative musical activity, Mr. Stevens said, “Flexibility is key,” and “it’s okay to have both” loud and boisterous participation as well as quiet and studious participation. As long as students are motivated to engage with the particular creative musical activity, that is all that matters, according to Mr. Stevens.
In the seventh grade band student focus group interview, I asked the students to share their experiences of working in groups for their sound composition projects. Emma, a seventh grade clarinet player, said that it was helpful to collaborate with others and learn about different perspectives on the creative musical process.

Seeing what other people have to say and their views on music helps you improve yours. Because if they know more about composing music or know more about music, it can help you write yours. … You can see other perspectives and change your view of music. (Interview, April 28th, 2022)

Similarly, Abby, a seventh grade percussionist, said, “I like how we can see other people’s ideas, and how our ideas are interpreted with other people.” Jack added that there are benefits to isolating certain aspects of the music when working in small groups as opposed to within the whole band. “When it’s small groups, you can focus on one aspect of the performance. When it’s the whole band, he can teach a bunch of parts. When you’re in small groups, you can focus on one specific part.” The benefits of collaboration were evident through the conversations with seventh grade students.

Mr. Vance – Effington High School

When I asked about how he viewed the role of collaboration within the riff building activity, Mr. Vance said, “The joy of making music is tied with who you’re making the music with.” He added that creating music individually can be beneficial and enjoyable, “but if you’re hearing others create ideas and bounce ideas off of each other, it’s way more fun. Your brain will start firing on a higher level in a group setting.” Specifically concerning his ideal classroom environment to foster agency among students, Mr. Vance said the environment should be loud and chaotic. “A lot of ‘oh!’ Everybody’s engaged, everybody’s playing. Music rooms shouldn’t really be quiet. I get creeped out when I walk into a music room and it’s quiet. It’s kids making
eye contact with each other, communicating with sound.” Explaining this point further, Mr. Vance said,

If a non-teacher walked in, they might think, “The wheels are off the bus. What is going on in here?” It’s active, it’s active music-making. When you throw 60 bodies in a room, yea it’s loud and chaotic. If it was only four of them, three of them would be too shy to stick out. (Interview, May 17th, 2022)

One reason why Mr. Vance chose to structure the riff building activity with the full band altogether was to allow students to actively participate without fear. “That’s the difference between large group and small, chamber group. Put students in mass, they’re hiding and are able to be confident with their musical ideas.”

In order to keep students’ motivations and attention on the creative musical activity, Mr. Vance said that he has found two particular actions that have helped: a lot of positive reinforcement and actively removing the stigma of making mistakes. When a student who typically does not want to share their creative ideas comes forward and volunteers to share, Mr. Vance said, “I make a big freaking deal out of it.” Student participants in the concert band student focus group interview reported that Mr. Vance’s approach of not controlling students’ musical ideas and allowing space for them to freely create was especially helpful. Alice, a sophomore flute player, said, “It helps your confidence with your ability to play on your own. You start to trust the people around you and start to understand how they work musically, and what they prefer riff wise. You start to work together.” The wind ensemble student focus group interview participants also described how Mr. Vance’s approach to making individual connections with each student and using humor to keep the mood light in rehearsal all help in maintaining a safe and inviting classroom environment.

**Intersections with Relevant Scholarship**
Each teacher participant held a slightly different approach in defining the appropriate classroom environment for their particular composition activities. However, both the teachers and the students whom I interviewed described the importance of collaboration during the creative process. The varied approaches toward an ideal classroom environment and the perceived benefits and challenges of pursuing collaborative composition activities will be considered in this section. First, I will present relevant scholarship in relation to the social considerations of musical creativity. In particular, I will focus on the notion of shared experiences through a discussion of the work of Sawyer (2000), Lapidaki et al. (2012), and Cólon León (2020). Next, I will explore perspectives regarding the classroom environment during the collaborative composition process, particularly focusing on the scholarship of Cross et al. (2012) and Burnard (2015). A holistic view of the social considerations of composition activities within instrumental music settings will result.

Shared Experiences

Through his experiences studying improvisational comedy in Chicago, Sawyer (2000) noted the importance of the interplay between individuals within a group during collaborative creative endeavors.

All of the elements of this dramatic structure are emergent—they have emerged from the collective interaction and creative contributions of all three actors. They have been created, but not by any single actor. … The performance that results emerges from the interactions of the group. (Sawyer, 2000, p. 182)

This emergence of creative products from social interactions is central to the creative musical process within each case. Mr. Porter’s student Chad described the need to create alongside peers in building individual agency to share their own creative ideas. Emma, a student in the seventh grade band at Skylerville Academy, said that she benefitted from learning from others with
regard to musical experiences and thoughts. Mr. Vance structured the riff building activity in a full band context in order to allow students to collaboratively create and not feel an intense spotlight of sharing creative musical ideas solo.

Lapidaki and colleagues (2012) strongly encouraged collaboration through creative musical activities in order to promote leadership roles among students, which can result in the development of individual agency. “When [leadership] experiences occur within creative musical contexts, a deeper level of ownership over creative and social structures may result” (Lapidaki et al., 2012, p. 375). The seventh grade band students at Skylerville Academy were exposed to leadership experiences through conducting their own sound compositions, and many of the eighth grade band students self-selected their roles within the collaborative composition of the video game soundtrack activity. The sound board role within the riff building activity at Effington High School was a chance for students to lead a full ensemble with visual cues to control the musical product. Each of these afforded students the opportunity to develop a deeper level of ownership and, perhaps as a result, a sense of creative musical agency.

Similarly, Colón León (2020) extolled the importance of allowing students to interact within the context of a large ensemble through the findings of their dissertation.

[I]n a large ensemble, with so many people around you making music together, the performers can still feel isolated. As shared by the students of the ensemble, it seems that beyond their instrumental group sections, they have little to no interaction with other performers in other instrumental groups. The idea of access to other musical groups and ways of musical knowledge, the exchange of information and the multidimensional understanding of everyone involved in the process of creating and performing music should be foundation for the composing ensemble. (Colón León, 2020, p. 171)
The notions of “exchange of information” and “multidimensional understanding” served as the foundation of each composition activity within this study. The eighth grade band students at Walberg Middle School reported their joy in “dissecting” musical structures to understand how they are created, and, in turn, how to better create novel musical structures themselves. By structuring the composition activities within a small group setting, Mr. Stevens promoted the exchange of information between students, specifically within their musical and cultural understandings. The desired result, according to Mr. Stevens, was a deeper level of musical understanding among students. However, according to the seventh grade band student Emma, there were also opportunities to learn from each other’s musical perspectives, similar to a multidimensional understanding resulting from the collaborative process. Mr. Vance’s focus of full group creativity was ripe for the exchange of information. Through observations of the riff building activity as well as reports from Mr. Vance regarding his approach to band rehearsals in general, the act of basing creative musical activities on compositional devices used by composers of wind band works they are currently playing served to promote a multidimensional understanding of the creative process.

Past scholarship has promoted the notion of collaborative creative practices, including the potential benefits of emergent creative products (Sawyer, 2000), leadership roles (Lapidaki et al., 2012), and information exchange and multidimensional understanding (Colón León, 2020). The teacher participants, as well as many student participants, corroborated these benefits through the particular contexts of each composition activity within their band. The following section will explore the specific impact of the classroom environment on the collaborative creative process.

**Classroom Environment**

In their descriptions of empathic creativity, Cross and colleagues (2012) stated that musicians needed “to be sensitive to the inner states of others; as an environment that may allow
us to experience feelings that are congruent with the feelings of others; and as a manifestation of a state of shared intentionality” (p. 340). The notion of “shared intentionality” is of particular importance within this study, as many teacher participants and student participants described the benefit of creating together toward the shared compositional product. Whenever students enter into a situation where they are collaborating in a group of peers, there exists the potential for unproductive and “off task” behavior (e.g., Hopkins, 2015). However, through scaffolded experiences where students are allowed to take on the perspective of others and develop a sense of empathy, “shared intentionality” can result. The way in which teachers structure the creative classroom environment can have significant impacts on the level of empathy and shared intentionality among their students.

Mr. Porter aimed to promote students’ level of individual ownership over their learning, referencing the notion of an autonomy supported environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017) as being particularly beneficial for students in creative musical activities. However, this proved to be difficult as the eighth grade band students did not have a significant amount of prior experience with creative musical activities. To remedy this, Mr. Porter provided multiple carefully scaffolded creative musical experiences earlier in the school year that built to the composition activity that I observed. He also provided positive reinforcement whenever possible for students who were demonstrating autonomy during the composition activity. Mr. Stevens described how the appropriate classroom environment to promote creative musical agency among students is context dependent. As evidenced through observations, I noted that the seventh grade students tended to personify the “goofy and loud” aspect of collaboration, while the eighth grade band students tended to work in a more quiet and “studious” setting. Mr. Vance believed that the classroom environment should be loud and boisterous anytime students are engaged with creative musical activities. Mr. Vance advocated for the development of creative musical agency
among all students through encouraging them to fully participate in the creative process, particularly allowing for students to “hide” amongst their peers while they create.

Burnard (2015) described the notion of intercultural creativities as “conceptual processes, as well as to processes of making and becoming” (p. 357). Through a focus on diverse musical creativities, students can experience the cultural artistic traditions of others and develop a sense of mutual respect and support. While not every case in this study encompassed an explicit focus on intercultural creativities, the threads of diverse musical creativities through cultural traditions were present. In particular, the eighth grade band video game soundtrack activity at Skylerville Academy involved students self-selecting videos to base their compositions on. Through the process of selecting the particular videos, students demonstrated the importance of basing their creations on their specific cultural understandings. In addition, the act of collaborating in groups provided the seventh and eighth grade band students at Skylerville Academy opportunities to learn from each other and build their musical, creative, and cultural perspectives. As Emma said, “You can see other perspectives and change your view of music.”

**Summary of Social Considerations**

There are many avenues to examine the social considerations surrounding creative musical activities, and particularly the notion of creative musical agency. In this section, I presented data from interviews with teacher participants and student focus group participants, as well as observational data. I also presented relevant scholarship regarding the benefits of emergent creative products (Sawyer, 2000), leadership roles (Lapidaki et al., 2012), the possibility of information exchange and multidimensional understanding (Colón León, 2020), the potential for shared intentionality (Cross et al., 2012), and considerations surrounding intercultural creativities (Burnard, 2015). Through examining intersections between the data and the relevant scholarship, it is clear that the benefits of collaborative creation in a social setting
outweigh the potential risks. Allowing students the opportunity to learn from each other and develop a shared sense of ownership over the creative process can encourage them to create meaningful musical ideas through this shared knowledge and understanding. In the following section, I will present a model of creative musical agency development based on the collaboratively creative contexts within secondary instrumental music as well as the work of Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010).

**Creative Musical Agency Development**

From the previous discussed elements of agency, namely the role of parameters and social considerations, there remains one looming question: what aspects promote creative musical agency development? More specifically, how might creative musical agency develop among students in an instrumental music context? This section will consider the previous elements of agency, as well as the previously discussed aspects of teacher action and thought in relation to composition activities, as well as the role of power. Through considering the gestalt of the previously discussed aspects, a model of creative musical agency development will be presented.

In their discussion of agency development, Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) describe learning as “less about practicing the routines of knowledgeable others than it is about recreating those practices in socially and culturally situated ways that confer on one more (or less) agency with which to participate across communities” (pp. 190-191). In considering the role of agency development within the process of learning, Bourdieu’s (1977) structure-agency dialectic focused on the recursive nature between an individual’s actions and the social structures that allow those actions to occur. Pushing beyond Bourdieu’s focus on the social structure, Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) instead aim for “a more critical approach to understanding agency to call
attention to both the socially *transformative* nature of agency and the intersecting roles of context, position, knowledge, and identity with agency” (p. 191).

In their model of agency development (see Figure 1 in Chapter I) Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) describe the process as the intersection of one’s identity with one’s ability to enact their identity within a figured world. “Agency is at once the possibility of imagining and asserting a new self in a figured world at the same time as it is about using one’s identity to imagine a new and different world” (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 192). This cyclical process honors the lived experiences and perspectives of the individual’s identity while acknowledging the individual’s ability to transform their identity through meaningful experiences within figured worlds. I will first discuss the notion of figured worlds in relation to agency development, followed by the notion of identity.

**Figured Worlds**

Holland, Skinner, William, and Cain (2001) defined figured worlds as “socially and culturally constructed realm[s] of interpretation in which a particular set of characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 2001, p. 52). These figured worlds offer individuals a way to understand and act on their own identities, as well as how the context of the activity shapes their actions. “The value of figured worlds in understanding agency emerges in how they set up identity and positionality as situationally contingent and under constant transformation” (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 192).

**Identity**

Concerning the role of identity and agency, Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) state, “Who one is and has the opportunity to become as made possible or not through access, role playing, and expression fundamentally shapes the process of learning” (p. 194). Identity, as it relates to
agency development, involves the social position of the individual and how this position may intersect with notions of power and status. “How novices choose to accept, engage, resist, or ignore such cues shapes their developing identity-in-practice and determines the boundaries of their authoring space, which is driven by a sense of agency” (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 193).

**Model of Creative Musical Agency Development**

The model of agency development created by Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) offers a holistic view of the process of agency development within educational settings. While this particular model was developed within the context of science education, it can be applied to other educational contexts. One such context is that of creative musical activities, particularly composition activities, and the specific development of creative musical agency. In this section, I will utilize the model of agency development created by Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) to describe elements of creative musical agency development within the context of composition activities in instrumental music settings. Throughout this discussion, I will reference a new model of creative musical agency development (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Model of Creative Musical Agency Development Within Composition Activities in Instrumental Music Contexts.*
It is important to note that I do not claim to have empirical evidence on the development of creative musical agency. The findings of this study involved particular aspects related to agency development found in past literature, including the structure of creative musical activities, the role of power, the role of parameters, and social considerations within instructional settings. From these findings, this framework for creative musical agency development within composition activities in instrumental music settings was developed in order to provide a theoretical lens in which the findings could be considered.

**Composition Activities as Figured Worlds**

Within creative musical agency development, the “figured world” represents the creative musical activity itself, including the parameters set in place, the social context for those involved, the classroom environment, and the creative products that result. The parameters of the
composition activities define the edges of what is deemed appropriate for students to explore. Parameters include elements such as the length of the composition, the key or tonal center(s), the harmonic structure, the specific context of instrumentation (acoustic, electronic, or a combination?), and the cultural context of the composition (e.g., the musical style and the corresponding cultural artistic traditions involved), just to name a few. The parameters provide students a structure within which to explore their creative musical ideas, and are typically structured by those who exercise power (namely, teachers). The creative products may include a written composition, using graphic or traditional notation, a performance of the final product of the composition, or a combination.

The social context in which students are allowed to create is also of utmost importance within the figured worlds of composition activities. The context may involve students creating alone, in small groups, or in a full ensemble setting. The way in which the specific social context of the composition activity is approached has implications for the success of the activity. Have the students been exposed to similar social contexts in previous creative musical activities, or musical activities in general? How are students allowed to collaborate, if at all? Scaffolding appropriate social contexts through prior creative musical activities is crucial to the ability of a student being successful through the current composition activity. The final compositional product that results is also an important aspect as it can determine the way in which students may structure their compositions as well as the social considerations of sharing or performing their creative works. Apprehension, timidness, and a lack of desire to complete the composition may result if the student is uncomfortable with the way in which the final compositional product is to be presented.

The classroom environment can have an immediate and lasting impact on the students’ abilities to freely compose. Considerations for the classroom environment include the way in
which the teacher interacts with their students (what is the type and frequency of feedback provided by the teacher?), the way in which the students interact with each other (through formally presenting their compositions and providing feedback, or through informally discussing their compositions with peers?), and the types of social interactions that are allowed and encouraged (how loud should the classroom be during this activity?).

Finally, the creative products that result can provide students a sense of completion and accomplishment from the activity. These products may include a written composition as well as a performance of the final version of the composition. From the perspective of agency development, students may have a path toward empowerment through sharing their creative work with others. This act of sharing, in turn, may transform students’ creative identities.

**Creative Identity**

Identity within creative musical agency development involves students’ musical understanding, their executive skill development within the particular instrumental context in which they pursue, their perceived level of competence through creative musical activities, and their cultural identity (or identities). The musical understanding of students is typically of utmost concern for music educators, and much of the instructional strategies and instructional materials are based on developing each student’s musical knowledge and skill. Similarly, each student’s executive skill development on their instrument is also a typical focus of instruction. A student’s instrument-specific technique can allow or inhibit their experiences with creative musical activities within instrumental music contexts. Students’ competence refers to their perceived level of musical understanding and executive skill on their instrument. Although musical instruction may focus on the development of a student’s musical understanding and executive skill, if they do not perceive themselves to be at the level needed to be successful within a creative musical activity, the student may not be motivated to pursue the activity. The cultural
identity of students also plays an important role within creative musical agency development since all humans hold artistic cultural understanding within one or more particular cultural traditions. The ways in which students’ cultural identities are illuminated are dependent on the specific musical and cultural contexts of the composition activity.

**Asserting Creative Identity Within Composition Activities**

As was evidenced through the interview and observational data from this study, there are numerous avenues for students to assert their creative identities within the figured worlds of composition activities. These avenues included prior scaffolded creative musical activities that promoted competence among students, students collaborating in small groups of peers, and the teacher allowing students greater freedom to explore the musical possibilities within the parameters of the activity. The contextual considerations for the assertion of identity involve both individual as well as social aspects. I will first describe aspects relating to the individual student, followed by the social considerations that allow for greater creative identity assertion.

The individual aspects of asserting one’s creative identity within the figured worlds of composition activities involve prior scaffolded experiences with creative musical activities, such as utilizing improvisation as a precursor to composition (Thornton, 2013). Each teacher participant in this study was deliberate in scaffolding prior creative musical activities to allow students the opportunity to utilize this prior knowledge and skill in the current composition activities. These prior experiences are the building blocks for which students’ musical understanding and executive skills on their instruments are built, and will determine the nature of the students’ experiences within the current composition activity.

The individual students’ perceived competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017) of their musical understanding and executive skill development is another individual aspect which will directly influence the type of experience they will have within the composition activity. For example, if
improvisation is serving as a precursor to the particular composition activity, and a student has had limited prior experiences with improvising, they will likely perceive their understanding and skill of improvising to be lacking and, in turn, will become afraid and uninterested in participating within the composition activity. Competence can have a direct impact on a student’s level of motivation to explore the full range of possible musical solutions to the problem of a composition activity, or whether or not to pursue the composition activity at all.

Another avenue of individual perceptions involves the students’ cultural identities (Burnard, 2015), specifically if and how these identities will be explored, mirrored, or neglected through the composition activity. As an example, if a composition activity is placed in the musical and cultural context of Irish fiddle tunes, and a student identifies with the particular cultural and musical identity of Irish fiddle music, they will be able to share their musical as well as cultural knowledge with others and potentially assert their creative identity through this experience. If composition activities are structured with careful consideration of the cultural identities of the students within the instrumental ensemble, there exists the potential for deep participation (Muhonen, 2016).

Within the social contexts of creative identity assertion, the specific forms of collaboration and the role of the teacher are integral. Regardless of the explicitly stated collaborative parameter, every composition activity will involve some sort of collaboration, whether it is between students or between students and the teacher. However, a carefully constructed composition activity that promotes student collaboration within an appropriate classroom environment can promote shared goals (Rusinek, 2007) and shared identity (Lage-Gomez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020) among students.

An interesting aspect of composition activities is that although students can experience the notion of shared goals among their group or within the whole class, the specific resultant
musical products of student-created compositions may not be similarly constructed. Put another way, while students may share the common goal of composing a piece of music within the specified parameters of a composition activity, they can individually flex against these parameters and find their own solution through their own creative voice to fulfill the creative task. Implications of the dual roles of individual and group considerations include opportunities for agency development both as a group of individuals and as individuals themselves. This tension between the individual and the group existed within each of the composition activities in this study, and is bound to exist in many creative musical activities within instrumental music.

The new framework for creative musical agency development acknowledges this tension by including both individual and social aspects among asserting creative identity within composition activities.

The role of the teacher within the composition process is one of the most important aspects to consider as there are massive implications throughout many aspects of creative musical agency development. The negotiation of power within the instrumental ensemble, outside of the context of a composition activity, must be considered. The manner in which students are able to assert their identities within the power structure of the ensemble may include notions of democratic practices (Allsup, 2002), student-led music-making experiences (Weidner, 2020), or very limited to no assertive experiences (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). If teachers are able and willing to share responsibility of the musical experiences with students, this transfer of power from teacher to student may allow for meaningful, potentially transformative, and agentive musical experiences to occur. Specifically within composition activities, the teacher must consider their role in providing feedback, including that of a leader or a facilitator (Allsup, 2002), how they mediate the social relations with the students in the ensemble (Spruce, 2021), and how they encourage students to take musical risks (Jónsdóttir, 2017). Another important
point is how teachers plan to assess student-created compositions, including avoiding social comparisons (Beghetto, 2005), and scaffolded experiences with clear structures (Leong et al., 2012).

Each of the aspects within individual and social considerations can play an integral role in the development of creative musical agency through the compositional process in instrumental music. The individual aspects of musical understanding and executive skill development will determine a student’s individual perception of competence (Ryan and Deci, 2017). The level to which a composition activity is based on or avoids students’ cultural identities (Burnard, 2015) can significantly impact the level of student buy-in and potential deep participation (Muhonen, 2016) with the students’ experiences through the composition activity. The social contexts involve the specific form of collaborative composing (Hopkins, 2015; Kaschub, 1997; Rusinek, 2011) and the possible outcomes, including shared goals (Rusinek, 2007) and shared identity (Lage-Gomez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020) among students. Of particular importance is the role of the teacher, who can act as a form of gatekeeper through the negotiation of power, both outside of (Allsup & Benedict, 2008; Weidner, 2020) and within (Allsup, 2002; Beghetto, 2005; Jónsdóttir, 2017; Leong et al., 2012; Spruce, 2021) the compositional context.

**Transforming Creative Identity Through Experiences with Composition Activities**

If the individual and social contexts of the composition activity are structured in an appropriate way, the teacher may transfer power to each student, allowing them to fully assert their creative identities within the composition activity and potentially transform their creative identity through their compositional experiences. One such way of potential identity transformation through a composition activity is when students flex against the parameters of the composition activity in meaningful and novel ways, including the manipulation of musical elements and forms of musical expression that result. As evidenced by the data in this study,
when students flex against the parameters of the composition activity, the musical possibilities and experiences that result can be significantly meaningful for the student, the ensemble, and the teacher. For example, there were multiple clarinet players at Effington High School who were creating challenging one-measure riffs during the riff building activity. Mr. Vance noted how they were most likely doing that to get “noticed.” Through my lens as researcher-observer, I saw the clarinet players going through the processes of imagining what could be and exploring the edges of what is allowed, searching for the particular way in which they were able to make the riff building activity their own and assert their creative identity within the figured world of the particular composition activity. The fact that Mr. Vance transferred power through this composition activity from himself to the individual students allowed these clarinet players to flex against the parameters, or as Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) stated, flex against “the boundaries of their authoring space, which is driven by a sense of agency” (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010, p. 193).

Ways in which students are allowed to collaborate can also potentially promote the transformation of their identities through the composition activity. When collaborating with peers, students are able to either defend or revise their musical ideas (Kaschub, 1997). The benefits of students collaborating through the creative process include emergent creative products (Sawyer, 2000), leadership roles (Lapidaki et al., 2012), as well as information exchange and multidimensional understanding (Colón León, 2020). Each of these aspects can serve in asserting students’ creative identities within the composition activity, and may result in the transformation of their creative identity through the development of creative musical agency.

As stated in Chapter I, the expansion of outcomes is the ultimate goal of creative musical agency. When students are afforded the opportunity to enact their creative musical identities within their figured world of a creative musical activity, they are able to realize their full
potential in producing musical outcomes beyond those previously possible. As was evidenced through observations and interviews with both teacher participants and student participants, the creation of a new musical idea involved a dependence on the students’ executive skills on their instruments, their musical understanding within the parameters of the activity, their competence with regard to their ability to create an original musical idea, the way in which they flexed against the parameters of the composition activity, and the nature of the collaboration with peers during the activity. From the dependence on these aspects of the creative musical process, new musical outcomes emerged, ranging from a new way to implement an arpeggiated figure within the confines of “big beat chord tones” at Walberg Middle School, the creation of sound effects on acoustic instruments that mimic the start of a race in a video of the Mario Kart video game within the video game soundtrack activity at Skylerville Academy, and the development of a short melodic riff that was rhythmically complex during the riff building activity at Effington High School. These musically creative outcomes occurred through the agentive actions of the student musicians, which were made possible by the transfer of power from teacher to student.

As described by teacher participants, the goals of composition activities were numerous, including the deepening of musical understanding, the refinement of executive skills, the growth in competence of student musicians, the summative process of sharing creative works with others, and a deeper sense of cultural identity through ownership over musical structures within specific cultural artistic traditions. Each of these goals represents a particular way in which a student’s individual creative identity may be transformed through the compositional process. This notion signifies the fact that creative musical agency development is not the development of any singular musical or social ability or competency, but rather the result of meaningful creative musical experiences that offer the opportunity for the transformation of a student’s creative identity.
Summary of Creative Musical Agency Development

There are individual as well as social considerations concerning agency development, as described by Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) and as evidenced in the findings of this study. Through asserting individual identities within figured worlds, students’ individual identities can be transformed and their sense of agency deepened, all within the group setting of a large instrumental ensemble. During musical composition activities, the specific role of parameters provides teachers and students with the guidelines in which to explore and assert their creative identities. The social contexts of the composition activities also allow students opportunities to develop creative products through an emergent process (Sawyer, 2000), leadership roles (Lapidaki et al., 2012), and information exchange and multidimensional understanding (Colón León, 2020). The classroom environment can promote or suppress students’ perceptions of shared intentionality (Cross et al., 2012) and intercultural musical creativities (Burnard, 2015).

It is important to note that this framework of creative musical agency development is meant to be considered specifically within the context of composition activities in instrumental music contexts. The structure of large instrumental ensembles has historically involved a significant amount of teacher-directed instruction, which some have deemed militaristic and authoritarian (e.g., Allsup & Benedict, 2008). However, due to the nature of large instrumental ensembles consisting of a large number of students in one instructional setting, teacher-directed instruction is often required to allow for meaningful musical experiences to occur. Individual agency and large instrumental ensembles are seemingly contradictory as there are often very limited opportunities for individuals to assert their identity within the figured world where scores of students are all focused on a convergent goal of accurately and expressively performing a prewritten musical work. The inclusion of creative musical activities in general, and composition
activities in particular, within the large instrumental ensemble setting can offer a path toward individual agency development, which is the intention behind this framework.

By reframing the model of agency development created by Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010) to involve composition activities within the specific music education context of secondary instrumental ensembles, I sought to provide future music educators with a framework for how they might consider structuring creative musical activities that can foster the development of creative musical agency and, by extension, individual students’ creative identities as musicians. The following chapter will summarize the findings and discussions of the previous chapters, as well as provide a potential path forward for the field of music education with regard to creative musical agency.
Chapter VIII

Conclusion

In each of the previous four chapters, the findings were presented alongside relevant scholarship to provide context and a meaningful discussion of each theme. The framework of creative musical agency development found at the end of Chapter VII offers music educators a way to consider the process of agency development with creative musical activities in an instrumental music context, and the importance of setting parameters, cultivating social contexts, and negotiating power within an instrumental music setting to foster creative musical agency. In this final chapter, I will provide a brief overview of the study, and conclude with suggestions for future research as well as teaching practice, both within P-12 and music teacher education contexts.

Rationale

This study framed creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental ensembles. Through exploring the notion of creative musical agency, philosophical aspects of the secondary instrumental music context were described, including the role of the large ensemble, specifically relating to power structures (e.g., Allsup & Benedict, 2008), democratic actions within ensembles (e.g., Allsup, 2002), and the relevance of the large ensemble structure with students’ musical and social lives (e.g., Kratus, 2007; Williams, 2011). These philosophical aspects illuminate the importance of addressing the role of power and potential avenues for creative musical agency development within instrumental ensembles. The sociohistorical traditions of large instrumental ensembles, including autocratic teaching styles
and limited opportunities for students to explore divergent outcomes to musical problems, have undergone transformation and reckoning in recent years.

The nature of composition activities also played a central role in this study. Prior research found that music educators support including composition activities as part of their curricula (Hopkins, 2013; Schopp, 2006; Strand, 2006; Vecchio & Hopkins, 2021). There are also perceived obstacles for including composition activities that many music educators report, including a lack of instructional time and technology (Fairfield, 2010; Strand, 2006), inadequate prerequisite creative experiences (Madura, 2007), the difficulty of learning improvisation (Forsythe, Kinney & Braun, 2007), and the limits of jazz being the typical route for creative instruction (Bernhard, 2013).

Lastly, the threads of agency were also integral to this current study. In educational contexts, the individual learner must possess a sense of personal agency over their thoughts and actions. Related areas of scholarship that inform learner agency include critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), student-centered learning (Blair, 2009), constructivism (Scott, 2011), and musical agency (Wiggins, 2015). There has been a number of scholars who advanced theories of agency development philosophically (Bourdieu, 1977) and empirically (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2010). Some scholars have explored the nature of creative musical activities, including Kanellopoulos (2015) philosophically and Muhonen (2016) empirically. However, few, if any, studies have explored the role of agency during creative musical activities within the specific context of instrumental music education.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings. Research questions included (1) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the instruction of composition activities to foster creative musical agency? (2) How do participants (teachers and students)
describe the social considerations of composition activities in fostering creative musical agency?

(3) How do participants (teachers and students) describe the negotiation of power in relation to composition activities to foster creative musical agency?

Past Literature

Creative musical activities have been examined through the use of multiple designs and in multiple musical contexts. Through a content analysis of 12 action research studies on collaborative composition, Strand (2009) found patterns that emerged, including teachers’ focus on the process instead of the product of composing, evaluations of student compositions (more complex musical elements resulted in more successful compositions), and beliefs that composition activities can help develop students’ ownership over the compositional process. Rusinek (2011) also conducted a literature review of nine action research studies on collaborative composition, finding that collaborative composition activities have the potential to promote student ownership over the composition process. Viig (2015) conducted a literature review of 89 research studies of collaborative composition, finding that the term “ownership” in relation to students’ descriptions of the composition process is prevalent in many studies, and should be explored in future research.

Scholars have also examined composition activities within secondary general music settings. Kaschub (1997) studied the collaborative compositional processes during two projects with secondary school music programs and found that when students challenged each other’s musical ideas, new musical ideas emerged through the processes of defending and compromising. Rusinek (2007) studied a group of students in a Spanish secondary school during a collaborative composition project and found that students preferred composing in a collaborative setting over an individual setting, citing the importance of adapting the pace of learning for individual needs, as well as individual and shared responsibility.
Specifically within the context of secondary instrumental music, some authors have examined composition activities through the notions of collaboration, identity, and culture. Hopkins (2015) studied the collaborative composition process among high school orchestra students and found that the balance of collaboration, mixed-gender groups, and enjoyment of the project all had a relationship with the quality of the student compositions. In his dissertation on the social aspects of collaborative composition within string ensembles, Phillips (2017) found the existence of multiple roles, including follower, advocate, tutor, and leader. Colón León’s (2020) dissertation explored intersections of culture and creativity within a high school instrumental “composing ensemble,” and found themes relating to the blended curricula of the composing ensemble, the role of community in an ensemble setting, representation within instrumental performance, and colonialism through the creative process.

Literature concerning threads of creative agency include the role of assessment, social contexts, and social justice perspectives. Regarding the role of assessment, findings in the meta-analyses by Bolden et al. (2020) and Beghetto (2005) point toward a focus on mastery goal structures. Considerations for assessment include the specific parameters on the creative process being made explicit, the overall goal of the assessment made clear to students, and opportunities for useful feedback being built into the assessment. The social contexts of creative musical activities can also have a significant impact on the development of creative agency. Sawyer (2000) found creative products emerge through group interactions and collaboration, while Lapidaki and colleagues (2012) found that agency development can be promoted through the implementation of leadership roles among students. Creative musical activities that promote empathic creativity (Cross et al., 2012), intercultural creativities (Burnard, 2015), and dialogism (Spruce, 2021) are especially important in creating a classroom environment ripe for the development of creative musical agency. Concerning social justice perspectives, Benedict and
Schmidt (2011) urged music educators to focus explicitly on the political nature of schooling and the external policy influences that impact opportunities for students to be agentive within music classrooms, which has been borne out in the educational policy agendas of many states enacting “divisive concepts laws” (NAfME Divisive Concepts Laws Town Hall, 2022). Katz-Buonincontro (2018) described the need to focus on creativity as a human right, and its implications for the development of creative agency.

Studies that have empirically examined creative agency in a general education context include Cremin et al. (2006) and the notion of “possibility thinking” (Burnard, 2006). Similarly, Jónsdóttir (2017) studied creative activities through possibility thinking and found that the locus of control in the learning environment impacts the development of student agency. Specifically within music education, the only empirical study that explicitly examines creative musical agency is the study on songcrafting by Muhonen (2016), which found three themes from participant narratives: peripheral participation (experiencing creative process from a distance), experimentation (act of making music, influenced by musical experiences outside of school), and deep participation (musical skill development and realizations of musical and creative agency). From examining the past literature, there has been a growing emphasis on promoting individual agency within the large ensemble structure, and a proliferation of research surrounding the notion of creative musical activities. However, there is no empirical research regarding creative agency within the context of instrumental music.

**Methodology**

This study employed a multicase design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The three cases included an eighth grade band in a middle school in the northeastern region of the United States, the seventh and eighth grade bands in a K-8 magnet school in the Midwest region of the United States, and two bands within a high school in the Midwest region of the United States. Teacher
participants were selected through key informant sampling (Patton, 2015) and were found through recommendations by music education researchers in the area of musical creativity. Student participants for the student focus group interviews included three to five students from each band, and were selected by the teacher participants as a form of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015) to offer a wide array of perspectives. Data included multiple individual interviews with teacher participants, focus group interviews with student participants, observations of composition activities in secondary instrumental classrooms, and artifacts including video recordings of composition activities in secondary instrumental classrooms and any final “products” of the composition activities (written composition, audio or video recordings of final performance of composition). Member checks, triangulation, and adequate engagement with data collection (Patton, 2015) were utilized in this study to ensure the trustworthiness of findings.

The interview recordings were transcribed and coded. The analysis of data included within case analysis immediately following data collection at each site. Next, cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014) followed, including the codes being collapsed into emergent themes. These themes included the pedagogy of composition activities, the role of power, and agency development. The final chapters of this study presented the findings and discussions of how these themes intersected with relevant scholarship, and the presentation of a framework for creative musical agency development within instrumental music.

**Findings and Discussion**

The findings chapters were organized by theme, including the notions of teacher action (Chapter IV) and teacher thought (Chapter V) in relation to the pedagogy of composition activities (Clark & Peterson, 1986), the role of power within the band classroom and within the composition activities themselves (Chapter VI), and the ways in which agency was approached,
fostered, and developed within each site (Chapter VII). Within chapters, specific aspects of each theme were presented through findings from each site, followed by a discussion of relevant scholarship. In this way, the delineation of “findings” and “discussion” was purposefully blurred to offer the reader a clear connection between findings and relevant scholarship.

Chapter IV involved the actions of the teachers with regard to the pedagogy of the composition activities, including the instructional strategies, instructional materials, and assessment strategies used by each teacher participant. The instructional strategies employed by the teacher participants included encouraging student collaboration and full participation during the process of creating their compositions. The end goal of student musical understanding that can be transferred between musical contexts was also shared among the teacher participants, and this was approached through the particular contexts of each site’s composition activities to promote ownership over the musical structures and lifelong musicianship. Instructional materials utilized by teacher participants included textbooks about the improvisation process (e.g., Azzara & Grunow, 2010), band pieces with opportunities for improvisations (e.g., Adventure Road), staff paper and the requirement of writing compositions using standard musical notation, worksheets including guiding questions as a precursor to the composition activity, and the selection of videos with which to base compositions. These varied uses of instructional materials were mirrored in relevant scholarship, including some scholars believing that musical compositions must be sequentially built from clear harmonic structures (e.g., Azzara & Grunow, 2010), while other scholars took a more holistic and potentially programmatic path toward initial sound conception (e.g., Blackshaw, 2020).

Assessing creative musical activities, particularly musical compositions, involves many social and musical aspects. Each teacher participant distinguished between formative assessments (utilize direct, verbal feedback applicable to an individual student) and summative
assessments (utilize rubrics for clear criteria of expectations and parameters). The way in which composition activities are introduced, including prior creative musical activities and the specific expectations of the composition activity, is also integral to the success of the activity.

In Chapter V, I presented the philosophical and contextual considerations of teacher thought involving the pedagogy of composition activities within each site, including the definitions of composition, each teacher participant’s goals of composition activities, the precursors to the composition activities, and the benefits and challenges of implementing composition activities within band curricula. Each teacher participant believed that improvisation serves as a necessary precursor to composition, and that developing a deep musical understanding among their students was a primary goal of the composition activities. They also described how students’ prior musical, social, and cultural experiences frame the composition activity, and must not be overlooked. Similarly, the scaffolding of creative musical instruction must be deliberately planned and implemented leading up to composition activities. While there are many reported obstacles for including composition activities within band curricula, the teacher participants in this study refused to allow these obstacles to serve as excuses, and instead reframed the goal of instrumental music education to focus on the creative process over a refined musical product.

Chapter VI explored the notion of power, both within the context of band and within the composition activities themselves. Music educators must work within the power structures of educational policy, although at times it is crucial for teachers to exert their autonomy and subvert the status quo of typical performance expectations to include creative musical activities within their curricula. Within the band classroom itself, the teacher participants in this study flexed against the traditional approaches of autocratic teaching styles and an implicit focus on convergent thought. The role of the teacher during the composition activities involved the notion
of “leader vs. facilitator” (Allsup, 2002), dialogic discourses (Spruce, 2021), and the act of encouraging risk-taking within the creative process (Jónsdóttir, 2017). Student voices were also presented, which illuminated the importance of shared goals (Rusinek, 2007), empathy (Cross et al., 2012), and shared identity (Lage-Gomez & Cremades-Andreu, 2020). Finally, the negotiation of power between teacher participants and their students during the composition activities revealed a variety of conceptions of how power is kept (Mr. Porter), shared (Mr. Stevens), or surrendered (Mr. Vance). The implications of these conceptions involve the locus of ownership and authority (Kanellopoulos, 2015) as well as social justice perspectives (Katz-Buonincontro, 2018) that foster genuine, individual expression through creative musical activities.

In Chapter VII, I presented two integral aspects of agency development within composition activities: the role of parameters and the social contexts of the composition activities. Within musical composition activities, parameters provide teachers and students with the guidelines within which to explore and assert their creative identities. The social contexts of the composition activities also allow students opportunities to develop creative products through an emergent process (Sawyer, 2000), leadership roles (Lapidaki et al., 2012), and information exchange and multidimensional understanding (Colón León, 2020). The classroom environment can promote or suppress students’ perceptions of shared intentionality (Cross et al., 2012) and intercultural musical creativities (Burnard, 2015). The discussions of parameters and social contexts led to the presentation of a framework for creative musical agency development, based on the framework of agency development by Calabrese Barton and Tan (2010). By reframing their model in the context of composition activities, I sought to provide future music educators with an understanding for how they might consider approaching creative musical activities that can foster creative musical agency.
Reflections

This study focused on the composition activities within three particular sites in the spring semester of 2022. This provided a snapshot of how each teacher participant approached composition activities within their band curricula and how student participants described their experiences during these activities. The particular time of the school year, the length of each site visit, and the specific activities that I observed all frame the findings of this study.

Had I visited each site at a different point during the school year, I would have observed a different type, and different depth, of creative musical activity. I visited each site in the last two months of the 2022 academic year, which resulted in the composition activities being based on prior creative musical activities during that school year. At Walberg Middle School, Mr. Porter had scaffolded his students’ prior creative musical activities to specifically lead to the composition activity with Adventure Road. Mr. Stevens had implemented creative musical activities at Skylerville Academy previously during the school year, including the thunderstorm composition with the seventh grade band students. However, during late April, he structured his band curricula such that both the seventh and eighth grade bands were pursuing composition activities simultaneously, as well as both bands performing the same piece of music written by a recent alum of the band program. I observed the high school bands at Effington High School after their final concerts for the school year, and their riff building activity was focused on full engagement of the students and the immediate result of a musical product at the end of one class. If I had visited each site earlier in the school year, I could have witnessed a different type of composition activity, perhaps with different parameters, goals, and almost certainly less requisite precursory musical activities.

I visited each site between one and three days, which offered a brief but holistic view of each band program, including the philosophical perspectives and instructional approaches of the
teacher participants and the voices of select students within each band regarding their experiences during the composition activities. If I had visited each site for a longer time, such as multiple weeks or months, I could have developed a deeper understanding of the specific social dimensions of the band program and of the creative musical activity within each band classroom, particularly between the teacher and students, between students themselves, and between the parents and the teacher. I could have potentially observed how each teacher participant specifically scaffolded their instruction through the use of multiple creative musical activities. A longer visit potentially could have allowed for the inclusion of more student voices besides the three to five students within each band, as well as potentially including voices of other stakeholders in the process, such as fellow music teacher colleagues, other subject area teacher colleagues, school administrators, and parents.

This study focused on creative musical agency within the particular context of composition. Had I focused on another form of creative musical activity, such as improvisation, I could have learned more about aspects relating to in-the-moment, temporal musical creation. A focus on improvisation would almost certainly bring forth a heavier focus on the role of social influences and classroom environment needed for students to feel safe and secure in sharing their improvisations. Motivations of students to pursue improvisation would also be a focus, including the potential fear of failure and the role of shame. These considerations can serve as recommendations for future research.

Suggestions for Future Research

While some authors have explored the notion of creative agency in general education (Cremin et al., 2006), others have focused within music education philosophically (Kanellopopoulos, 2015) and empirically (Muhonen, 2016). This study aimed to provide the field of music education with an understanding of how three teacher participants and their students
describe their experiences with composition activities within a secondary instrumental music context, and how these experiences might help us understand creative musical agency. However, since this study focused on a small number of participants and was limited in scope, it can only provide a limited perspective on the notion of creative musical agency. Other research designs, selecting other participants, and including other parameters for the study can and should be implemented within future research in the realm of creative musical agency.

This study employed a multicase design. Future research might employ quantitative methods, particularly a large-scale survey study on the prevalence of creative musical activities and the demographic and socioeconomic make-up of each school district. Similarly, a survey of a large sample of instrumental music teachers could elicit results that illuminate the instructional strategies and materials utilized during composition activities or teachers’ philosophical perspectives on the role and development of creative musical agency. Another avenue of future research might include examining the Model of Creative Musical Agency Development Within Composition Activities in Instrumental Music Contexts empirically through a quantitative design. Empirically examining creative musical agency through combining elements of identity and musical self-concept (e.g., Randles, 2010) with creative musical agency development (e.g., Muhonen, 2016) could foster new and interesting lines of inquiry relating to creative musical agency development. A mixed methods approach might involve a survey of the implementation of creative musical activities among preservice music teacher education methods courses, and follow-up interviews with select respondents regarding their philosophical perspectives and instructional strategies of creative musical activities. A historical study might explore how instructional materials, such as digital audio workstations (DAWs), or instructional strategies of composition activities have developed over the past several decades within the context of instrumental music.
Another form of future research might remain within the realm of comparative case study design, but include different participants. A specific focus on cultural diversity among teacher or student participants is needed to elucidate their approaches and experiences during the composition process. A particular focus on teacher participants who are apprehensive about including creative musical activities can also be helpful to inform future professional development and preservice music teacher education on how best to foster teachers’ competence and motivation to include creative musical activities within their curricula. The collection and analysis of different forms of data may elicit important findings, such as artifact interviews with student compositions, analysis of assessment rubrics for composition activities, or video stimulated recall with student or teacher participants using video recordings of composition processes and performances of composition products.

Future research might also involve a similar design as this current study but involve different parameters, such as focusing on improvisation or interpretive performance instead of composition. A comparative case study on improvisation could focus on different social and motivational aspects from teacher and student participants. The notion of interpretive performance as a form of creative musical activity (Webster, 2002) and the intersections with creative musical agency is also desperately needed to understand the types of instructional materials, strategies, and philosophies that best serve students through transferring power from teacher to student. A deeper examination of agency development using other models could reveal a deeper understanding of how creative agency is developed among instrumentalists, especially individually and as a group. Regardless of the specific design, participants, or parameters, future research is essential in uncovering the particular aspects of creative musical agency within the context of instrumental music education.
Suggestions for Teaching Practice

There are multiple recommendations for teaching practice based on the interviews with teacher and student participants as well as the composition activities observed within the three cases of this study. Within a P-12 teaching context, it is clear from prior research and from discussions with teacher and student participants in this study that the inclusion of any creative musical activities within an instrumental music curriculum is essential. Ideally, the creative musical activities will be systematically and consistently implemented throughout the P-12 musical experiences, regardless of concentration (e.g., elementary general music, middle school band, high school music technology). Through consistent and scaffolded creative musical activities, students will be afforded opportunities to organically develop their creative musical agency over multiple years and in multiple musical contexts. Experiences with creative musical activities from a young age, such as within Kindergarten elementary general music classes, can help build a type of creative “readiness” for instrumental music education. Within an instrumental music context, improvisation and composition can be implemented from the start of instrumental instruction, such as improvising using the first three pitches learned on the instrument. Such early experiences with musical creativity may allow for the capacity for deeper musical understanding, greater creative competence, and the development of creative musical agency. Regardless of context, the focus in structuring creative musical activities must be to match each student’s musical knowledge and skill with the particular parameters of the composition or improvisation activity. By differentiating activities when necessary, teachers can achieve similar objectives by the end of creative musical activities, including the development of creative musical agency among their students.

Within music teacher education, there are a number of implications and suggestions from past research and this current study. It is clear that music teachers need to have experiences with
improvisation, and not only within the context of jazz ensembles. By learning approaches of teaching improvisation and composition, music educators will be less likely to avoid creative musical activities in their teaching and more likely to appropriately structure meaningful composition and improvisation activities with their students. Ideally, students in music teacher preparation programs will have multiple opportunities to implement creative musical activities within a “real” music classroom, perhaps during early field experiences or within their student teaching placements. While this may be challenging, it is absolutely worthwhile and can provide future educators their first glimpse into what is possible when applying students’ musical understandings through creative musical problems. Similar to the calls for the “Improviser-Composer-Performer” model of an undergraduate music major (Campbell, Myers, & Sarath, 2016), there is a significant need to develop the skills as well as the mindsets needed for future music educators to explore with their students through sound. Whether the specific context involves improvisation, composition, or interpretive performance, the development of a malleable mindset of adaptive expertise (Conway & Hibbard, 2019) is crucial to prepare music educators for decades to come.

**Final Thoughts**

This study aimed to understand creative musical agency within a secondary instrumental music context. Since the sociohistorical aspects of large instrumental ensembles have focused on teacher-directed instruction and teaching styles that promote convergent thinking (i.e., the perspective of the conductor), creative musical activities and the notion of developing creative musical agency offer alternative approaches to the power structures present within an instrumental ensemble setting. The teacher participants in this study shared ways in which they promote the transfer of power from themselves to their students, and their students corroborated this through descriptions of their experiences. I also witnessed the compositional process within
three distinct large instrumental ensembles and noted the similarities and differences in instructional strategies, materials, philosophical approaches, and negotiations of power present within each.

While this study offers a small window into the potentiality of instrumental ensembles to promote, foster, and develop students’ creative musical agency, the implications and suggestions that result should open up an entirely new line of inquiry within the music education profession. The structure of large instrumental ensembles has gone through a reckoning in recent years, and approaches to foster individual student agency in meaningfully ways are being sought. I believe creative musical activities are an excellent avenue to foster this individuality within an ensemble because they allow for divergent thinking and individual solutions to a single creative musical problem. This independence is key, as described by the eighth grade band student Layla at Skylerville Academy. When I asked if she could describe her favorite part of the video game soundtrack activity, Layla said, “Freedom. … We have a lot of freedom to create.”
APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sample Interview Protocol—Instrumental Music Teacher

Date/time of interview: ___________________________________________________

Location:______________________________________________________________

Interviewer: _________________

Interviewee: ____________________________________________________________

Purpose of this study: The purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings.

Data sources: I will interview instrumental music teachers regarding their planning and delivery of composition activities with their students. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Time frame: I expect that this interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with composition?
   a. Where and when did you learn how to teach composition?
   b. In your view, what are the reasons to include composition activities within your instrumental music curriculum?
   c. What do you see as the greatest benefit for you students?
   d. In your view, what are the biggest challenges of including composition activities within your instrumental music curriculum?

2. Tell me about your preparation for this composition activity.
   a. What went into planning for this activity? What elements have you tweaked since the last time you led students through this activity?
   b. What are the potential issues that you foresee with this activity?

3. Tell me about the composition activity.
   a. How long will the activity take? How many classes? How much time during each class?
   b. Will students be working alone, in small groups, or as a whole ensemble?
   c. Walk me through the sequence of introducing the activity to your students – What are they expected to know and be able to do prior to starting the activity? Is this an extension of previous activities or a separate, one-off activity?
d. Walk me through the step-by-step process of the composition activity – What are students expected to do? In what sequence? Are there checkpoints along the way? What does the final “product” look like by the end of the activity?

4. Tell me about how you assess the composition activity.
   a. How do you plan to provide feedback during the activity? What is your role in the process?
   b. How do you assess your students’ creative work? How does the nature of this activity impact the assessment/feedback?

5. Describe ways that a student’s creative agency is developed through composition activities.
   a. How does this activity help to develop a students’ level of ownership over the creative process? How do you help?
   b. How does this activity help to develop a students’ ability to generate original creative musical ideas? How do you help?
   c. What should be avoided to ensure the students are developing ownership over the process?
   d. In your view, what other elements play a role in developing students’ creative agency?

6. Anything else to add?

Reminder of confidentiality and use of data
Appendix B

Observation Protocol

Date/time of observation: ___________________________________________________

Location: ________________________________________________________________

Researcher: __________________________________________________________________

Purpose of this study: The purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings.

Data sources: I will observe composition activities with secondary instrumental students. This observation will be video recorded for analysis.

Protocol

1. Describe the physical setting
   a. Physical space
   b. Layout of equipment
   c. Technology utilized
   d. Instruments
2. Describe the classroom environment
   a. Role of teacher (facilitator? leader? guide?)
   b. Demeanor of students (excited? nervous? quiet?)
   c. Student engagement (who is participating? who is not? how?)
3. Describe the composing process
   a. Are students working alone or in groups? Size of groups?
   b. Specific guidelines for activity?
   c. Timeline for activity?
   d. Product of activity?
4. Describe moments during the composition activity that include the following:
   a. Posing of questions
   b. Play
   c. Immersion
   d. Innovation
   e. Risk-taking
   f. Being imaginative
Appendix C

Sample Interview Protocol—Instrumental Music Students (Focus Group)

Date/time of interview: ___________________________________________________

Location:______________________________________________________________

Interviewer: ____________________________________________________________

Interviewees: _________________ __________________________________________

Purpose of this study: The purpose of this study was to describe creative musical agency within the context of composition activities in secondary instrumental music settings.

Data sources: I will interview instrumental music students regarding their experiences with composition activities. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Time frame: I expect that this interview will last around 20 to 30 minutes.

Interview Questions

1. What were you asked to do during the composition activity?
2. What were your favorite parts of the activity? What were your biggest challenges?
3. What did your teacher do during this activity? How did they help?
4. What other creative activities have you done in band/orchestra in the past?
5. Did this activity change the way you make music? Why or why not?
6. Did this activity motivate you to create your own music? Why or why not?
7. Anything else to add?

Reminder of confidentiality and use of data
Appendix D

Analysis Protocol for Artifacts

Date/time of analysis: ___________________________________________________

Location: ________________________________________________________________

Researcher: ____________________________________________________________

Analysis Overview

• How was the artifact utilized within the composition activity?
• How does the artifact represent the process of revision?
• What meanings, if any, have student participants ascribed to this artifact (from student focus group interviews)?
• How does the artifact represent the development of agency among students?
• If a recording of performance…
  o What was the setting of the performance?
  o Who participated in the performance?
  o What elements appear in the performance that were observed earlier in the process? What changed?
• If a written composition product…
  o What musical elements are included in the composition?
  o Who collaborated on the creation of this composition?
  o How long did the composition take to create?
Appendix E
Sample Coding Document

WALBERG MIDDLE SCHOOL DATA ANALYSIS

Interview w/ Mr. Porter

File name: “Walberg –Interview w/ Mr. Porter #5 (4-12-2022)”

- [4:30] Reference to Amabile’s “Consensual Assessment Technique” (if a bunch of people say it’s creative, then it’s creative)
  - **Assessment**
- [6:30] What is the appropriate amount of feedback during small group instruction?
  - [8:15] “It’s the art of teaching rather than the science of teaching, I suppose”
    (need to sense the appropriate feedback within every context)
  - **Classroom Environment**
- [16:50] For a project like this, what do you see are the parameters that you’re giving them? What are the edges of the box that they’re supposed to stay within?
  - 16 measures, constrained by length
  - I, IV, V in major tonality
  - Using 4/4 time
  - Concert E-flat major
  - Supported by fact that they’ve done tunes by ear in Concert E-flat major, have learned melodies and bass lines by ear in this key before
  - Up to them: Rhythms they use, pitch choice (to a point – built on “big beat chord tones” from Azzara book used for improvisation)
  - **Parameters**
- [20:45] Do you have some sort of rubric in mind?
  - Avoid numeric feedback on rubric until they’ve had many opportunities to explore – moving into refinement
  - Importance of musical PLAY before being graded (exploratory)
  - If they see a 2 or a 3 out of 5, they will think they’re not good at this, they will not be motivated to grow or get better with this
  - [22:45] “They’re not ready to be graded on their compositions”
  - Play within familiar harmonic structures (most popular music sticks within I, IV, V) – Because this is what they’ve been exposed until this point, this is where I’ll start to engage them with this process
  - **Assessment, Role of Teacher**
- [26:30] Your ideal classroom environment. Ideally, what kind of vibe is in the room?
  - Percussion lesson 4-12 is pretty typical – that would not be much different if I (researcher) was not there
  - [27:45] “Another thing I work on is focusing on learner agency and kids be in charge of their own learning.”
“They can’t do anything independently, I’m discovering. My 7th grade jazz band will not look up a piece of music. [Co-teacher] found the same thing. We tried eliminating grades for lessons, we try not to grade just for showing up. … Without that penalty of a bad grade, kids wouldn’t do anything”
Appendix F

Sample Worksheet from Skylerville Academy Eighth Grade Band

VIDEO GAME SOUNDTRACK
Composition Project

Name: ________________________________

♪ Guided questions (at least 3 complete sentences per answer)

♫ Write a short story about the character and their actions in the video game.

♫ What is the mood of the video game? List at least 3 adjectives to describe it.

♫ You are required to match your music up to ONE thing in the video (but if you chose to synchronize more you can). Circle one below:

♫ Smashing rocks with the hammer
♫ Hang gliding
♫ Getting hit by the animal

♫ How will your music match this scene? Be specific and use musical definitions in your answer (tempo, rhythm, pitch, dynamics, articulation, etc).
Appendix G

Sample Worksheet from Skylerville Academy Seventh Grade Band

Name: ___________________________  Hour: ______

**Sound Composition - Part Two**

Music composition does not have to be in standard notation. It doesn’t even need to be on an instrument! In this activity, we will be creating a composition using three different sound effects:

1. Whoosh
2. Ding
3. Boom

You will be **conducting the class** using different gestures to indicate which sounds your classmates should make; however, the class will **not be able to see your composition**. You will have to use physical gestures to tell the class what sound to make, how loud/soft, how intense, how long/short, etc. Make sure your gestures are clear!

On the back of this page is a graph. Using the graph, note how you want your sound composition to sound. Think about the following:

- How long do you want each sound to last?
- How loud/soft should each sound be? How intense?
- What will each sound look like on the graph? Will that affect how it sounds?
- What gestures should you use? How can you vary your gestures to make different sounds?
- How long is your composition? (It should be 20-60 seconds)
- What is the title? Is there a deeper meaning to the piece? Should you explain it before performing?

*Good luck and Have Fun!*
Title: __________________________
REFERENCES


251


Presentation as part of National Association for Music Education Music Teacher Education Conference, February, 2021.


253


