

Student Perceptions of Composition Activities
in Two Secondary Ensembles of Different Ability Levels

Marissa Guarriello

mguarriello47@gmail.com

Eastman School of Music,
University of Rochester

Kevin Feher

kfeher@pennridge.org

Pennridge High School

Accepted for presentation at the annual conference of the Pennsylvania Music Educators
Association, Kalahari Resort & Convention Center, Poconos, PA

April 23 - April 24, 2020.

Submitted for alternative poster-session presentation on view at the PMEA Research
Webpage, May 15-June 15, and the abstract for archiving at the PMEA Research Webpage.

Abstract

Current educational practices in music often condition students to focus on performing “correctly” in order to prepare for festivals, compositions, and auditions causing teachers to use prescribed and unimaginative activities as lesson materials that will guarantee a successful performance. However, teachers are looking to challenge these prescribed practices by implementing creative activities into their classrooms.

Teachers are often interested in helping students achieve measurable results. As such, they may use prescribed methods that lack creative activities in order to help students achieve pre-set standards of success and monitor progress. National organizations such as the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) (Gulish & Guarriello, 2019; nafme.org, 2019; Norris, 2010; Shuler, Norgaard, & Blakeslee, 2014) list creating as one of the four primary artistic processes in their national standards. The inclusion of creativity in standards encourages the use of creativity in all music classrooms including secondary music ensembles. However, the existing research literature could be better equipped with information as to how implementing creative activities impacts student learning in secondary music ensembles.

The purpose of this study is to investigate student perceptions of composition activities in two different levels of secondary music ensembles. I chose to ask the following four research questions: 1) What are students’ current perceptions of their readiness for composing? 2) What do students find valuable about completing a composition project in band class? 3) In what ways are students’ experiences and attitudes about creating music similar to or different from their experiences and attitudes about playing previously composed music? 4) In what ways are students’ perceptions of creative experiences similar and different between students in different ensembles? To learn the answers to these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with students and their teacher pertaining to their experience and attitude about their composition project.

Applications to classrooms

- Showing the outcomes and perceptions of inclusion of creative activities in music classrooms
- Experiences of students using creative activities on a secondary level
- Gives examples of creative activities in secondary ensemble classrooms
- Encouragement of more research and inclusion of creative activities