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High School Musicians and their Perceptions of Music in Academic and Non-Academic Settings

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Abstract

Contemporary research has shown that school music programs have increasingly struggled with relevancy in recent years (Boon, 2014; Green, 2006; Woody, 2007) as students primarily experience music outside of school through informal practices of popular music and culture. It is therefore extremely important for music educators to better understand the perceptions their students have of music in both of these settings. In this study, students were asked via survey and interview about their perceptions of the music they make in school and in other settings, such as at home, with friends, or as a part of a religious activity. Findings included a wide range of statements and numerical data from students about preferences and perceived differences between in school and out of school music, suggesting that a mixture of informal and formal classroom practices are needed in all music classrooms in order to better reach students with diverse musical experiences outside of school.

Introduction

One central goal of music educators is to help students develop the ability to make music independently as adults. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) has for years recommended that this be done by implementing their National Standards for Music Education, recommending that students (a) create music through both singing and playing instruments, (b) improvise and compose original music, (c) listen to music and describe it in words, and (d) understand the connections between music, the other arts, history, and culture (NAfME, 1994). The newly created CORE Arts Standards, a more refined statement of

standards, expects students to "Create, Perform, Respond, and Connect" in all artistic classes, including music (NCCAS, 2014). This list organizes eleven artistic standards into these four categories, to better define the broader themes of arts education.

The goals from both of these lists, however, speak only to the outcomes of the musical instruction in the classroom. They remain open ended as to the many contexts in which these goals can be achieved. While traditional music instruction, (defined here as the ensemble settings of chorus, band, or orchestra), can be effective using the of the Art music of the last 300 years along with traditional, formal instructional practices, the majority of the musics students experience outside of school are vastly different from those they encounter in traditional school settings (Woody, 2007). Popular musics, including Gospel music and other contemporary sacred musics, often fall outside of the areas of instruction in the school setting (Boon, 2014).

Similarly, the contexts and environments in which students interact with these musics further separate these styles from music taught in school. While in the traditional setting students are generally taught by from a podium, playing music selected by the instructor and read from notation only, according to Green (2006), music made by students outside of the school context is mainly done in informal settings, with material chosen by the students themselves and learned by ear instead of the traditional means of music notation. Through this study, Green suggested that by using an instructional approach that is more native to today's students, music educators can potentially engage students in all types of musical styles, even if these students would be hesitant to play the same music in a traditional setting. Her work has

also suggested that students can be equally disengaged in learning popular musical styles

through traditional methods rather than through more authentic and informal means.

Therefore, understanding the ways in which students perceive the different contexts in

which they make music and the musics they encounter in those contexts is highly relevant to

music educators. Understanding the ways students perceive both the music they study in

school and the music they interact with at home and in society may lead to new or better

informed means of music instruction in school that better engages today's students. Research

in this area could also lead to new ways of implementing the CORE Arts Standards in all school

music contexts, as traditional music instructors have historically struggled to create lessons that

regularly use all nine of the original national standards (Woody, 2007). Furthermore, these

understandings may lead to new opportunities to engage students who would otherwise not

participate in traditional school music environments, and provide a music education to students

who otherwise would miss out on the opportunity for not fitting into the "traditional" music

education mold.

In this study I attempted to uncover how secondary music students perceive the music

they make in school compared to the ways they perceive and interact with music outside of the

school context.

It should be noted that this study does not aim to address the quality or value of any of

the music taught in school or that students are exposed to outside of school. While the

researcher himself and many music educators may have certain biases towards certain musical

styles, this study looks only at the different ways scholastic and non-scholastic musics are

perceived in their contexts. Future research could be done to understand more fully how the

complexity or other stylistic elements of the musics students interact with affects or is affected by these perceptions.

Literature Review

Goals of Music Education

One key aim of music education is to give every student the opportunity to participate in musical experiences. This goal is built upon the understanding that music is inherently creative, imaginative, and expressive while also a vault of cultural and historical knowledge that is significantly enriching to human development (NAfME, no date). Music education therefore serves to expose students to new musical ideas, make students more discerning of all of the musics they encounter, and make them more able to make music outside of the school environment.

Cultural Differences between Music Made Within and Outside of School

The music experienced within school is often very different from the musics students interact with outside of the music classroom. Boon (2014) observed these differences in a case study of her own classroom. Boon interviewed 10 of her 4th and 5th grade African American violin students, seeking to understand how these students perceived the music they were learning and making on the violin. The students reported enjoyment and satisfaction in playing the violin, but also revealed its isolation from the musics the students interacted with at home. The students reported that the styles of Hip-Hop, R&B, and Gospel were "black music," tying it to their own identity as Black individuals. Similarly, they reported that these styles of music are

shared with their families at church, and in what they watch on television (i.e., all of the students cited daily time with family watching the channel BET). As a part of the study, Boon incorporated rhythms native to the styles of Hip-Hop and R&B in an activity dubbed "Stepping Violin." The activity incorporated these rhythms both in standard violin playing and through dance movements connected to the instrumental music. When asked about this new activity, the students described it as a combination of "classical and rap" and reported a higher motivation to repeat the activity and use such elements in other violin-learning activities. Griffin (2009) also observed the same phenomenon on a smaller scale among elementary school students, showing that student perceptions and preferences for types of music were influenced by parents and older siblings. Allsup (1997) observed the strength the idiomatic elements of these culturally relevant styles have to offer contemporary music education. All popular musics contain idiomatic elements and different sets of terminology with which its listeners become familiar. While these idioms and terminology may vary, they are all adaptable to the classroom to teach universal musical ideas (Allsup, 1997). By identifying the cultural backgrounds of his students and the musical styles connected to those cultures, Allsup was able to use these idioms as gateways to expose his students to musical concepts and diverse musical styles.

In addition to the idiomatic elements of these musics, popular musics of today exist in musical contexts that differ greatly from traditional music educational practice. Instead of notation-based practices that involve significant analysis and the traditional Western values of refined harmonic and melodic content (often simply dictated by the instructor), popular music naturally exists in informal settings and includes practice based on intensive use of aural skills in

place of notation (Green, 2006; Woody, 2007). Green (2007) claimed that students perceive music made in these traditional means as boring and belonging to "old people", while music made in the more informal context is more engaging to them. In her studies, students who learn both traditional/classical music and popular music in this 'Informal Learning Practice' showed signs of increased engagement and interest in both types of music in the informal setting as opposed to the more rigid and formal one.

The work of Tobias (2014) supports this research, suggesting that an approach to music education that mixes these informal opportunities for learning that are native to popular music with formal music instruction can be very effective. Observing a music class that was built around a song composition project, Tobias observed students incorporate musical experiences from outside of school, such as their prior knowledge of music technology, pre-constructed preferences for certain musical styles, and experience on instruments and singing with musical training already done in school and more formal opportunities for music instruction. The structure of the classroom allowed for a 'soft line' between musical experiences from in or outside of school, and allowed for students to use a common musical vocabulary and also informed students' future perceptions of music while listening on their own.

Need for Further Research

Further research is needed in this area because more data regarding the perceptions of music of secondary students will better serve music educators in achieving the goals of music education, namely, in giving all students the opportunity to have authentic musical experiences and making every student into a lifelong music maker. The work of researchers like Allsup

(1997) and Boon (2014) has shown the need for music educators to better understand the perspective and perceptions of music all students from diverse backgrounds bring into the classroom in order to reach them and teach them new musical understandings. Further studies in the vein of Green's (2006) and Tobias's (2014) research using informal learning practices or mixed practices can begin to meet this need. A greater understanding of how students perceive the music they make in school and interact with elsewhere will give music educators tools for more effectively communicating musical skills and concepts through the music they select and the means by which they expose their students to it.

Methods

In this study, Connecticut public high schools in close proximity to the University of Connecticut were contacted to participate in the research. In districts that allowed this research to take place (permission was granted by school principals), the music teachers at these schools distributed a URL link to a survey hosted on the UConn Qualtrics website to students who are enrolled in any type of ensemble-style music class. On the survey, the students were asked questions about the classes and ensembles they participate in at school, the ways that they make music at home, with friends, as a part of a religious activity, or other means, and their perceptions in each musical context (See Appendix A for full survey). Using a slider system, the students were asked to identify how similar or different they perceived the musics they make in each context to be to school music on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 meaning that the student perceived the music experienced in school to be nearly identical to that made in the specific context, and 1 meaning that the student perceived the music made in school to be completely

different from music made in the specific context. Students were also asked which context was their favorite context to make music in. Finally, students were asked if they would be interested in being interviewed about their responses at a later date. Students were not required to complete every question of the survey, and could skip any questions they wished.

Among students who expressed interest in being interviewed, those who met the following criteria were contacted to be interviewed:

- The student is in 9th-12th grade.

- The student participates in at least one in school ensemble.

- The student participates in least one extra-scholastic ensemble or other means of music making outside of school.

- The student gave a response to the prompts about how school music and out of school music are either different or similar that the researchers viewed as being of interest. These were determined on a case by case basis.

- The student agreed to be interviewed and provided a means to be contacted.

Students who expressed interest in being interviewed and who met these criteria were sent a follow-up email to the address they provided. After this stage, the single student who continued to express interest in being interviewed was sent, via email, a parent permission form that was collected at the onset of the interview. During the interview, the student was asked further questions about their responses on the survey. The interview was scheduled to take place at the students' high school in a room without teachers or peers present, to protect confidentiality. Field notes were taken during the interview to facilitate the inquiry process. The

interview was recorded using a password-protected computer, and later transcribed. All

procedures were approved by the IRB.

Out of thirteen school districts contacted, five (n=5) were willing to participate in the

survey. To protect confidentiality, the high schools will be identified as follows:

School #1 – A regional, rural school district

School #2 – A suburban school district

School #3 – A rural school district

School #4 – A rural school district

School #5 – A rural, regional school district (no surveys successfully collected from School # 5)

From these five, surveys were attempted by 121 students (n=121), with a 43% dropout

rate. 70 of these surveys were completed and submitted by students. As the survey did not

force completion of each individual question, these completed surveys did not always include

answers to every question.

Among the survey participants, 22 students indicated that they would be willing to be

interviewed at a later date. Of those 22, 15 met the criteria to be interviewed, and of those 15,

only one student replied to follow-up emails. That one student was successfully interviewed.

Numerical data collected from the surveys was organized by demographic, with means

of each group and the number of responses by demographic included. The data were then run

through SPSS software to check for differences between groups. One way between-groups

analyses of variance were done by gender, by grade level, by the type of traditional ensemble,

and by school district. A, interesting difference seemed to exist between jazz band and

traditional band students in regards to music made at home and music made with friends. An additional one way between-groups analysis of variance was therefore done between students involved only in band compared to students who participated in Jazz band and students who participated in neither.

The open ended survey results and interview transcription were first openly coded by the general content of the student responses. These included ideas such as "Positive," "Beneficial," "Neutral," and "Negative," etc. After this general overview of the data was done, themes began to emerge from the student responses. Student responses were then grouped and organized into these themes. These themes found in the interview and survey questions were then compared to the numerical data to triangulate the findings to identify common trends.

Findings

Numerical Data

The three questions that allowed the students to provide their answers via a slider on a scale of 1-10 were the following:

8. If you make music at home, how similar is this music to the music you make in school? Rate you answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being nearly identical, and 1 being completely different.

9. If you make music with your friends, how similar is this music to the music you make in school? Rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being nearly identical, and 1 being completely different.

10. If you make music as a part of a religious activity, how similar is this music to the music you make in school? Rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being nearly identical, and 1 being as different as possible.

Included on the tables below are the Minimum and Maximum score for each question, the

Mean, Standard Deviation, and total number of respondents per demographic. Initial results of

interest were as follows:

While more students identified themselves as 10th graders, there was no majority

among the four high school grade levels among participants. Out of 66 participants who

answered the gender question, only 11 identified as male while a large majority identified as

female (54 participants), with 2 preferring not to identify gender. The majority of participants

were enrolled in chorus and/or concert band (37 and 35 participants, respectively), as some of

the participating districts allow for their students to take multiple ensemble classes. Very few

students were enrolled in the other traditional ensembles of orchestra (4 participants) and Jazz

band (8 participants). Of the 9 participants who selected "Other School Ensemble", 9 types of

ensembles were identified, including chamber groups (Brass Quintet, Percussion, Flute Choir,

Chamber Choir, Carolers), and more specialized traditional ensembles (Honors Choir, Symphony

Orchestra). 2 of these groups identified by students were extra-curricular school ensembles

(Pep Band, Musical Theatre). As these ensembles were all indicated by individual students who

also participated in another school ensemble, these ensembles were not used to group

students for data analysis. Almost all of the participants (62) who selected at least one means of

music making outside of school selected "At home, alone" as a means of making music outside

of school. A majority of students (40) who answered the question also indicated making music

with friends as a means of non-scholastic music making. Smaller percentages of students

selected the informal means of music making outside of school, such as "At home with family" (28), "As part of a Religious Activity" (13), "At Parties" (15), "I compose my own music" (11), or "On a computer or Tablet" (18). Few students selected non-scholastic ensembles, such as Youth Orchestra (3), Community Band (2), or being in a band (8). Those students who selected other identified private music lessons (1) and regional school music festivals (2) as other means of music making. One participant identified "Sign language while singing" as a means of non-scholastic music making. No further information was given in that area. As with in school ensembles, due to these music making opportunities being identified by individuals, they were not used for data analysis. (Regional school music festivals were considered to be in-school music making activities, and were likewise not included in out of school music activities).

Overall, students gave data using the full range of the sliders. The means of the scores of questions 8-10 were 4.65, 4.16, and 3.89, respectively. Standard deviations were also overall fairly high at 2.52, 2.53, and 3.29, respectively. Of note among the results from the individual demographics include:

- 10th graders were the largest grade demographic, and gave below average scores, and averaged the lowest among the grade demographics. They also had relatively low standard deviations of 1.88, 2.21, and 1.79 respectively.

- Students involved in school orchestra (6.25, SD=2.63) and community band (6, SD=0) gave high scores to the school/home question. Students who make music at parties gave low scores (3.2, SD=2.14) to the school/home question.

- Males (3, SD=1.63), 10th Graders (3.5. SD=2.21), 11th Graders (3.75, SD=1.22), Choral students (3.71, SD=2.19), students who make music as a part of a religious activity (3.33, SD=2.18), students who make music at parties (3, SD=2.24), and students from schools #2 (3.71, SD=2.29) and #3 (3.5, SD=2.2) gave low scores in response to the school/friends question.

- Students involved in Jazz Band (6.3, SD=2.9; 7, SD=1.7) and Youth Orchestra (6.67, SD=3.06; 6.5, SD=.71) gave high scores on both the school/home question and the school/friends question.

- When asked about school music compared to music made in a religious activity, Males (7, SD=3.46) and students who were in their own bands (7.5, SD=.71) gave high scores. Females (3.45, SD=3.04), 10th Graders (1.8, SD=1.79), Students in Band (2.82, SD=2.71), Marching Band (3, SD=2.98), Jazz Band (1, SD=0), students involved in chamber music programs (3.67, SD=3.79), and students from School #4 (1, SD=0) gave low scores to the same question.

- When analyzing this data, it became apparent that many of the demographics were underrepresented in the survey. Few participants identified as Male, made music in school ensembles like jazz band or orchestra, or made music outside of school in a Youth orchestra or Community Band.

I further examined the data by comparing specific groups within the sample using analysis of variance (ANOVA). I used SPSS to conduct one-way between-groups ANOVAs to determine group differences based on gender, grade level, school district, and type of

traditional ensemble. Given the number of tests, I used a Bonferroni adjustment for the significance level, dividing a standard $p=.05$ by 5 to yield a value of $p=.01$.

By Gender. Groups were divided into three groups based on their response on the survey (Male, Female, or Prefer not to Identify). There was no statistically significant difference by gender at the $p < .01$ level for any of the three questions, school versus home [$F_{(2, 62)} = .070$, $p=.932$]; school versus friends [$F_{(2, 46)} = .462$, $p=.633$]; or school versus religious activity [$F_{(1, 24)} = 4.450$, $p=.046$]. The third of these reflected a reasonably large difference descriptively between males and females (means of 7.00 and 3.45, respectively), but given the small number of male responses and the adjusted significance level, the difference may not be deemed statistically significant. More research is necessary in order to explore this possible difference. See Table 1 for the means of these groups.

Table 1: *Means by Gender*

	School v Home			*School v Friends*			*School v Religious Activity*		
Gender	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**
Male	10	4.40	2.41	4	3.00	1.63	4	7.00	3.46
Female	53	4.68	2.59	43	4.28	2.64	22	3.45	3.04
I prefer not to answer	2	3.00	1.41	2	4.00	0.00	0	-	-
Total	65	4.65	2.52	49	4.16	2.53	26	4.00	3.30

By grade level. Students were divided into four groups (grade 9, 10, 11, or 12). There was no statistically significant difference at the $p < .01$ level for any of the three questions, as

follows: school versus home [$F(3, 61) = .613$, $p=.609$]; school versus friends [$F(3, 45) = .882$,

$p=.458$]; or school versus religious activity [$F(3, 22) = .984$, $p=.419$]. See Table 2.

Table 2: *Means by Grade Level*

	School v Home			School v Friends			School v Religious Activity		
Grade Level	*N*	**Mean**	*SD*	*N*	**Mean**	*SD*	*N*	**Mean**	*SD*
9th Grade	11	4.73	1.68	10	4.80	2.49	4	5.00	4.69
10th Grade	21	4.05	1.88	14	3.50	2.21	5	1.80	1.79
11th Grade	15	5.07	2.87	12	3.75	2.22	10	4.20	3.01
12th Grade	18	4.94	3.24	13	4.77	3.11	7	4.71	3.64
Total	65	4.65	2.52	49	4.16	2.53	26	4.00	3.30

By School District. Students were divided into four groups by school district. There was

no statistically significant difference at the $p < .01$ level for any of the three questions, as

follows: school versus home [$F(3, 58) = 1.622$, $p=.194$]; school versus friends [$F(3, 42) = .928$,

$p=.436$]; or school versus religious activity [$F(3, 21) = 2.466$, $p=.090$]. See Table 3

Table 3: *Means by School*

| School | School v Home | | | School v Friends | | | School v Religious Activity | | |
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
School #1	15	4.47	2.23	7	4.00	2.00	4	5.00	3.74
School #2	21	5.38	2.96	16	4.81	2.81	6	1.00	0.00
School #3	18	4.44	1.95	17	3.41	2.24	9	5.00	3.71
School #4	8	3.25	1.91	6	4.17	2.14	6	4.17	2.71
Total	62	4.61	2.44	46	4.09	2.41	25	3.84	3.26

By ensemble. Students were divided into six groups by traditional ensemble (Chorus only, Band only, Orchestra Only, Chorus and Band, Chorus and Orchestra, and all three ensembles). Note that no students participated in band and orchestra but not chorus. There was no statistically significant difference at the $p < .01$ level for any of the three questions, as follows: school versus home [$F_{(5, 59)} = 1.057$, $p=.393$]; school versus friends [$F_{(5, 43)} = .916$, $p=.480$]; or school versus religious activity [$F_{(2, 23)} = 4.591$, $p=.021$]. Note that descriptively, there appeared to be higher means on the last question for students in chorus as compared to those in band only, but no statistical significance was evident under the adjusted alpha level. See Table 4 for the means of these groups.

Table 4: *Means by Ensemble*

Ensemble	School v Home			School v Friends			School v Religious Activity		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Chorus Only	28	4.11	2.02	24	3.46	2.25	15	4.87	3.50
Band Only	26	5.19	2.97	17	5.00	3.00	8	1.50	1.41
Orchestra Only	2	7.00	4.24	1	4.00		0		
Chorus and Band	7	3.86	1.95	5	4.60	2.07	3	6.33	2.08
Chorus and Orchestra	1	5.00		1	3.00		0		
Chorus, Band, and Orchestra	1	6.00		1	6.00		0		
Total	65	4.65	2.52	49	4.16	2.53	26	4.00	3.30

Jazz v Band. Because of the initial observation of high means among Jazz band participants, an additional one way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted between students who participate in jazz band, students who participate in traditional band only, and all other survey participants. There was no statistically significant difference at the $p <$ .01 level for any of the three questions, as follows: school versus home [$F_{(2, 62)}$ = 1.964, p=.149]; school versus friends [$F_{(2, 46)}$ =4 .910, p=.012]; or school versus religious activity [$F_{(2, 24)}$ = 1.169, p=.328]. Note that for the school versus friends question, the group participating in

both jazz and band seemed to have a higher mean than the other two groups; however, with the adjusted alpha level, the difference cannot be deemed statistically significant. More research is necessary in order to explore this possible difference. See Table 5 for the means of these groups.

Table 5: *Means for Jazz and Band*

	School v Home			School v Friends			School v Religious Activity		
Ensemble	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Neither	31	4.32	2.20	26	3.46	2.16	16	4.63	3.52
Band Only	26	4.54	2.66	18	4.39	2.70	10	3.00	2.79
Jazz Band and Band	8	6.25	2.92	5	7.00	1.73	1	1.00	
Total	65	4.65	2.52	49	4.16	2.53	27	3.89	3.29

Text Responses

Text response survey results were first openly coded. Results were then sorted thematically based on the coded results. As some student responses were lengthy, results containing multiple, seemingly conflicting statements were treated separately, and each statement was paired with its matching code. The themes uncovered during this process were as follows:

1. ***Some students were motivated to participate and be engaged in school music making because they perceived it as challenging, and liked the challenge***. Many students who responded in this way seemed to want to clarify that this challenging activity was perceived to be fun instead of boring.

    "Challenging, creative, and exploratory"

"Challenging, rewarding, varying repertoire"
"It's challenging and lots of fun to perform."
"Very emotional and a good challenge."
"I would describe the music as exceptionally challenging"
"Challenging with a good amount of fun."
"Challenging, but very fun."
"The music is enjoyable, but still provides challenge"

2. **Some students perceived the line between school music making and music making with friends outside of school to be blurred, suggesting that school music making is for them primarily a social activity**.

"…enjoy being a part of the group"
"…being part of a band is a great experience"
"I like to play in school with all my friends"
"School, because i am surrounded with people who share the same passion for music"
"School or friends because it is essentially the same thing"
"School or with friends"
"At school with a small group of friends…"
"I prefer making music at school because I feel like I am part of something larger than myself."
"School because I am with a fantastic group of people…"
"I like playing music in school…because I'm around other people who do what I do [the] best and enjoy it in the same way I do"
"I feel part of something in a band and I observe the rewards more clearly."
"School is best. I feel the most comfortable in a band /group situation."

3. **Some students described school music as beneficial, yet identified other music as their primary musical interest**. These results suggested somewhat of an "eat your vegetables" perception of school music making held by these students.

"…it keeps you open minded"
"Fun and educational"
"Our band performs a diverse amount of music"
"It's so amazing to see how we all progress as individuals and as a group"
"Each piece [is] telling a story of how hard we work..."
"I prefer to make music at school …we can improve each other's sound."

> *"school, I like the supportive environment and learning new things and perspectives."*

4. ***Some students viewed musical preference as context-specific, preferring different musical styles based on both location (school, at home, with friends) or the activity (listening, composing, performing)***. These results also often clarified the different experiences of listening to music and making music. While listening habits were not a part of this study, further research in this area could be a very interesting supplemental study.

> *"To listen I love indie and alternative… However, as a pianist I LOVE Chopin."*
> *"It depends. There I some pieces that I play on my own at home that I enjoy. However, I love some of the "slower" pieces that we play in concert band."*
> *"Folksongs, pop, and classical"*
> *"depends on the setting, if I'm with my friends we sing popular music, in band at school I enjoy all sorts of music."*
> *"I prefer listening to metal music, and writing it, but I prefer to perform choral music"*
> *"I prefer the styles we play at school. It is more diverse, as at home I will stick to one genre."*
> *"I don't have a preference, I enjoy all of the music I create."*
> *"I prefer singing acoustic because I very much enjoy that type of sound. I identify with powerful lyrics sung softly but with intensity... That being said chamber music can sometimes make me feel the same."*
> *"They [choral pieces] are not songs I would usually listen to on my own. However, sometimes they can be pleasant to play or sing."*

5. ***Some students placed a high value on self-expression in all musical contexts, both in formal school settings and informal settings outside of school.*** While most students gave this reason for preferring music making at home, it was interesting to observe students use similar reasons to explain their preferences for different musical contexts.

> *"Home because I can be more free"*
> *"At home, because I have more freedom to do what I want"*
> *"At home alone, because it feels more intimate"*
> *"I can write what I'm feeling in that moment"*
> *"It gives me a place to embrace my spirit"*

"Spiritual, Fun, Jazzy, Beautiful, Inspired"

*"It's in general much more appealing because I don't feel obligated to play
certain music like I do at school."*

*"I can work at my own pace and don't have the pressure of others relying on me
or feeling like I am being judged."*

"Probably school…its spiritual in its own way."

"I get to let loose and have fun and sing how i want."

"I would prefer Religious activity because that music just really speaks to me"

*"I just…feel every pulse of the music, rather than analyze every part writing
piece."*

"It is a lot more free than school…"

Interview

The student who was interviewed identified herself in the survey as an 11ᵗʰ grade

female who participates in Band, Marching Band, and Jazz Band in school, and makes music

outside of school home alone. Using the slider, she described the music she makes at home as a

"4," on the scale of 1 to 10 (10 being identical, 1 being completely different). While this student

did not identify many means of music making outside of school, she was principally contacted

because of her responses to Questions 5 and 12 on the Survey. See "Appendix B" for the full

interview transcript. Her responses were as follows:

5. How would you describe the music you make in these school ensembles?

> *"For our concert band I would say generally typical concert music as in well-known and*
>
> *respected composers. In jazz band we do less typical music as in we play what we want*
>
> *at the time and play second line music and sometimes we even write our own music to*
>
> *perform"*

12. If these settings use very different styles of music, which style is your preferred style of

music? Why? Please be as specific as possible.

> *"I like playing my jazz bands music the best because jazz makes me feel more free and*
>
> *expressive and it makes me feel like I'm not being held back on a leash and that I have*
>
> *freedom."*

This students answers were of interest because of the contrast the student described

between the environments of concert band (a more firmly established traditional school

ensemble) and Jazz band, the youngest of the traditional school ensembles. During the

interview, the student further explained her perspective on the difference between these

ensembles:

> *"Well, I think it's very beneficial, because I get to do what I want to do with Jazz, because*
>
> *jazz is what I, I like doing jazz, and concert band sort of brings me back to what I, like,*
>
> *have to do, and, what is good to do."*

This response seemed to indicate that the student viewed the more traditional setting

of concert band has 'healthier', or more beneficial to her musical training than the more fun

and individual Jazz band. This matched Theme 3. **Some students described school music as**

beneficial, yet identified other music as their primary musical interest.

While the student did not initially provide on the survey any information of strong

interest about music made at home, her answers provided in the interview were of much

interest. When asked about her answer to Question 7, describing her music making outside of school, she described the process of finding tunes, melodies, or pieces she found interesting and learning to play them on her own:

"I mean, like, I just, I'll listen to, I'll watch a movie, and, I'll, it has a cool sound effects, and I, 'I want to play that, that's really cool!', so I'll go out and I'll buy the book, 'cause, I wanted to learn how to play it, and then I play it, and it's fun to play and I, like, when I get really aggravated with practicing, like, regular stuff I'll go and play the fun stuff."

The student elaborated on this statement later in the interview, comparing this music she makes at home to the music she makes in school:

"The music in school is a lot more difficult, and it's more challenging for me to play, and takes a lot more time to figure out, and I like that, because it broadens what I am going to be able to do on my instrument, and then I can take that back to the other, more simple stuff, and make it better."

These statements together both match Theme 1 (***Some students were motivated to participate and be engaged in school music making because they perceived it as challenging, and liked the challenge***) and Theme 3 (***Some students described school music as beneficial, yet identified other music as their primary musical interest***). Her statement also seems to combine the two themes, liking the challenge because it is perceived to be beneficial to the music she plays on her own, outside of school. The subject followed up this comment by stating that her

music making at home does not challenge her to "broaden", or "make better" her musical

abilities:

> *Investigator:*
>
>> *"Do you ever feel that you push yourself when you do the stuff at home, like, the*
>>
>> *outside of school stuff?"*
>
> *Subject:*
>
>> *"Not particularly."*

The subject therefore views her music education experience at school as offering her

something she herself would not do on her own: Challenging herself to be a better musician.

Of note also was the subject's description of the dynamic of what activities and rehearsing are

like in the Jazz band setting. While she describes her experience as "fun" and "free" in her

survey responses, matching Theme 5 (***Some students placed a high value on self-expression in***

all musical contexts). Her elaboration in the interview showed that these activities very much

align with the National Standards for Music Education in the areas of evaluation of musical

performances and thinking critically and reflectively about music:

> *"Well with concert band you have what's written on the page, that's what you play,*
>
> *you're with, there's me and then there's 11 other trumpets. We all have to play the same*
>
> *thing, we have to play the same way, and like, you play what's written on the page, how*
>
> *it's written on the page, but then, in jazz band you go, and you can, it's not, 'this is*

what's written on the page, you're playing this'. You can discuss how you want it played,

like, if, it's not concrete when you get the paper. There's a little bit of what you want to

do. Self-expression."

When asked if the music she makes at home is similar or different to any of these musical

activities she participates in at school, she answered:

"…music I play at home is more like… I have a Taylor Swift book, Disney books, and

Phantom of the Opera, those are all vastly different from the stuff we play, in regular

band and jazz band, even"

The subject was also asked about her perspectives on the nature of learning music in each of

these contexts:

Investigator:

> *"How about the music you make at home, is it a similar experience you have, to*

> *the jazz band experience, like, do you feel the same freedom, to, I know it's with*

> *yourself, but do you feel there's like some sort of discussion process you do with*

> *yourself on how you're going to play that kind of music?"*

Subject:

> *"I mean, I think the music I play at home is probably similar to concert band*

> *because I want to sound like it actually sounds so it's more like… I mean that's*

usually how it's written on the page, but if it's not then I guess I change it a little

bit, so it's kind of a bit of both."

This response seemed to suggest that the subject viewed music making at home as so informal that it blended elements of the structure of school music (reading notation, an pre-defined ideal of how the music should sound), but also some discretion and flexibility of she perceived a need to stray from the printed ideal.

Discussion

General Statement

The numerical data, individual responses, and interview results all suggest that it is extremely difficult for music educators to reach every student using a single, catch-all approach to music education. None of the numerical data showed any significant difference at the $p < .01$ level between any of the groups, which supports the range of themes that emerged from the constructed responses of the survey, such as some students being motivated by the challenge or benefit of school music, or finding more value in the freedom of personal expression that is found in music made outside of school in an informal environment. This was again observed in the interview, where the subject showed interest and engagement in traditional school music, yet also showed a preference for music made in the freer environment of the Jazz band or the comfort of making music on her own.

Relation to Current Research

These findings support the work of previous researchers in this area. Student value on self-expression and a preference for informal musical experiences lines up directly with the findings of Green (2006) and Woody (2007). The mixture of preferences for challenging school music and more informal musical practices outside of school strongly supports the implementation of models like those observed by Tobias (2014), where a mixture of formal and informal types of educational practices can exist to serve the needs of different students with different preferences.

Application to Practice

While it can be easy to take the step to say that traditional ensemble classes must go and should be replaced exclusively by informal popular-music-driven music technology courses, (as some have argued, e.g. Williams 2011) the findings from this study do not suggest that this would be the best course of action for current practice, for much of the data showed student engagement in these traditional spaces. As they have in the past, band, orchestra, and chorus can continue to effectively educate some students. What the findings instead suggest is that in order to engage and reach more students, a varied approach to music education in public schools needs to be implemented. The traditional Band, Chorus, or Orchestra classroom experience will not engage every student all of the time. It is therefore important for music educators to incorporate more informal learning opportunities in the traditional classroom for the marginally engaged student (Such as the ones present in this study), and also to offer more informally driven music classes to reach the students who were missed by the current traditional music education system (those students who never participated in this survey because of their non-involvement in a traditional music program).

Further Research/Limitations

The shortcomings of this study are principally a result of the lack of data collected. Due to time constraints, the survey had to be closed with only 70 completed surveys, resulting in some demographics to include only a handful of students, if any at all. Similarly, most students who completed surveys were female choristers or band students, leaving male students, orchestral and jazz players, and students from more emerging school music ensembles out. The schools that participated in the survey were also rather homogenous, and surveys collected from more urban districts would have added greatly to the findings of this study. Further research could also include a more in-depth look at the demographics of the participants, including race, access to the internet, Socio-economic status, or the musical experiences of parents or other family members.

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Appendix A: Full Survey

What year are you in school?

- ☒ 9th Grade
- ☒ 10th Grade
- ☒ 11th Grade
- ☒ 12th Grade
- ☒ Other ☒

What is your gender

- ☒ Male
- ☒ Female
- ☒ I prefer not to answer

What school do you attend?

☒

Select all of the following School music ensembles you participate in.

- ☒ School Chorus
- ☒ School band
- ☒ School marching band
- ☒ School Orchestra
- ☒ School Mariachi Ensemble
- ☒ School Jazz band
- ☒ Other School ensemble ☒

How would you describe the music you make in these school ensembles?

☒

Select all of the following ways you sing and/or make music on instruments outside of school. (This does not include practicing the music for your school ensemble)

- ☒ At home, alone
- ☒ At home, with my family
- ☒ With my friends
- ☒ I am in a band
- ☒ Youth orchestra
- ☒ Chamber music program

- ☒ Community band
- ☒ As part of a religious activity
- ☒ At parties
- ☒ I compose my own music
- ☒ On a computer or tablet
- ☒ Other: ☒

How would you describe the music you make in each of these activities outside of school?

☒

If you make music at home, how similar is this music to the music you make in school? Rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being nearly identical, and 1 being completely different.

	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Slider										☒

If you make music with your friends, how similar is this music to the music you make in school? Rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being nearly identical, and 1 being completely different.

	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Slider										☒

If you make music as a part of a religious activity, how similar is this music to the music you make in school? Rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being nearly identical, and 1 being as different as possible.

	12		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Slider ☒

Of these settings (School, Home, with Friends, or Religious Activity) which is your preferred setting to make music in? Why?

☒

If these settings use very different styles of music, which style is your preferred style of music? Why? please be as specific as possible.

☒

Would you be willing to be interviewed at a later date about your answers on this survey?

- ☒Yes
- ☒No

If you are willing to be interviewed at a later date, please provide your name and email address at which to contact you.

☒

Appendix B: Interview Transcript

Investigator:

"This interview is being conducted on March 26th at 2:30 PM. Right, so just first of all we are going to confirm all of the information that was in the form, essentially, everything that you say or have given also on the survey is confidential. Your participation is voluntary. You can chose to walk out and leave at any time if any of the questions offend you or anything along those lines, and we have no intention of inflicting any harm on you. Ok?"

Subject:

"That's good, I guess"

Investigator:

"First of all, do you have any questions? Thank you for agreeing to participate"

Subject:

"I think I'm good"

Investigator:

"To facilitate our note taking we would like to audio tape our conversation today. Dr. Joseph Abramo and myself, Matthew Rescsanski, will be the ones to hear these recordings. You have agreed on the consent form to be audio-taped, but I want to make sure that you are comfortable with this. Do I have your permission to continue audio recording?

Subject:

"Yes"

Investigator:

"We have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. During this time, we have several questions that we would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Dr. Joseph Abramo and myself are conducting a study on how secondary music students perceive the music they interact with inside of and outside of school. We will ask you questions about your responses to our survey about how you view the music you make inside of school and in other ways outside of school."

"So first of all can you, um, we got a lot a stuff from your survey, but can you tell me more about your involvement in school here, in music in school here? Excuse me"

Subject:

"Well, I am in concert band and jazz band, so I have the jazz band class during the day and we do our concert band thing at night, once a week at night"

Investigator:

"Ok, can you tell me more about that?"

Subject:

"Which part of it?"

Investigator:

"The concert band at night, since it is not part of the school day"

Subject:

"Well, I think it's very beneficial, because I get to do what I want to do with Jazz, because jazz is what I, I like doing jazz, and concert band sort of brings me back to what I, like, have to do, and, what is good to do. I mean, I don't know. And, concert band is difficult too, because, we, like, don't practice that very much, like, since I'm in the jazz class, so I have to do like, a lot of that on my own, the practicing of that. The we get to come here and hear it as a whole, which is also better than, like, the individual classes during the day, have, like, just the small ensembles, and this, we go and like the whole band is there"

Investigator:

"So its different periods and they all combine. Ok. Got it. You said you kind of phrased that as the concert band is what is good for you and what you have to as opposed to the jazz band?"

Subject:

"Well, I mean, well, concert band is like, what is done, like, that's just like a thing to do, that I've always done, and then jazz band is like, a thing that I started. I mean, I don't know"

Investigator:

"I just didn't know if you thought maybe one was, you know, better for you, in the way that you worded it."

Subject:

"Well, I think that jazz band is way, is, very beneficial because it increases my variety of music that I listen to and have to play and in the different ways to play it, ways to play my instrument, and, yeah."

Investigator:

"Ok. Great, thank you. So I've got the ensembles you play in already, I've got that. Um, do you do any singing at all, in addition to playing?"

Subject:

"No."

Investigator:

"Ok. Um. Ok, so can you tell me about any of your musical activities that are not school related?

Subject:

"Well, I definitely like, I bought a bunch of books, like, for my instrument from Music & Arts, to like, play stuff that I wanted to play.

Investigator:

"Ok. Could you tell me more about that, like, what did you want to play, and what made you want to play it?

Subject:

"I mean, like, I just, I'll listen to, I'll watch a movie, and, I'll, it has a cool sound effects, and I, 'I want to play that, that's really cool!', so I'll go out and I'll buy the book, 'cause, I wanted to learn how to play it, and then I play it, and it's fun to play and I, like, when I get really aggravated with practicing, like, regular stuff I'll go and play the fun stuff."

Investigator:

"Good, ok. Um, do you do that at all with your friends or is that mostly done on your own?

Subject:

"Well, I mean, it's mostly by myself, but, like, some of my friends have me make copies of my books to give them so they can use it too, but…"

Investigator:

"Ok, great. Thank you. So how do you, um, feel about your musical experiences in school?"

Subject:

"I've, well in high school it definitely opened my eyes more, I mean like in middle school it was more like simple I guess? Like, you just learn, I don't really know how to phrase it, like, ordinary things and then you get into high school and it just, kinda pulls everything together and teaches you more, and, I think it's definitely fun and its definitely, like, it's definitely helped with stuff."

Investigator:

"Ok. Helped in terms of, you mean what?

Subject:

"Like, it's just, this is, like, better than a class you would have in school, like, everyone feels like included, it's like a little family. Well, big family, actually."

Investigator:

"Sure. Sure. Ok. Um, so how do you feel about…the, you've touched on it a little bit, but how do you feel about, like, the books and the stuff you do outside of school, like, when you want to do something fun, besides just fun, does that make you feel anything in any particular way?"

Subject:

"Um, I mean think it's pretty cool because, I buy stuff and then my sisters, like, I bought like a Disney songbook, and then my sisters are like, 'Hey you should come play this for me, 'cause I want to hear it', and I think that's pretty cool. Like they'll see me, they know like, 'cause I'll be upstairs practicing one day like, and the next day they'll be like, 'hey you were playing that song yesterday, I like that, you should come play it for me"

Investigator:

"So you get to share that with your family. Great. Ok. Um. Ok, so how do you feel, um, about the music in school compared to the music you make at home?"

Subject:

"The music in school is a lot more difficult, and it's more challenging for me to play, and takes a lot more time to figure out, and I like that, because it broadens what I am going to be able to do on my instrument, and then I can take that back to the other, more simple stuff, and make it better."

Investigator:

"Great. Do you ever feel that you push yourself when you do the stuff at home, like the outside of school stuff?"

Subject:

"Not particularly."

Investigator:

"So you feel the school experience pushes you, and then the, um, you're able to bring that outside, and it's a way that… sorry, the school experience does something for you that you wouldn't do on your own?"

Subject

"Yeah, definitely."

Investigator:

"Alright, ok, great. So, those were some broad questions, now, more specifically to your own survey, um, what was one… So you said the music you, um, experience in school is 'typical', you referred in question 5, you phrased it as 'the generally typical concert music'. So, what does typical mean to you?'

Subject:

"I mean, like, marches. Like, a bunch of bands play, like marches and stuff."

Investigator:

"Are there particular pieces right now that you're playing that you can…."

Subject:

"I mean, right now, we're playing '*Second Suite in F for Military band…"*

Investigator:

"Holst?"

Subject:

"Yeah, by Gustav Holst"

Investigator:

"That's a really […] standards in concert band, certainly. Ok, and you compared that to, um, in jazz band you play, you defined it as second line music, I'm not familiar with that term, could you explain what that means?"

Subject:

"Well, it's like, we have the melody line and we have the bass line and then we kind of put it together and it's like not organized almost, it is organized, but it's not, kind of. And like, we'll have one section come in at a time, like, first the bass line, then the melody comes in, one section at a time, and then it overlaps with each other and it's really cool."

Investigator:

"Ok, so that's just a stylistic thing, it's a stylistic structure. Ok that's great, and you also mentioned that in that experience you get to write your own music to perform, so I'm really interested in that
Subject:

"Well, I took music theory and we wrote stuff, but, the other, last concert, we, the jazz band as a whole, we put together a song, like, we, someone came up with a, like, really so... Improv soloing one day and someone came up with a good idea I think and then, we, we decided to try and build something off of it and we made our own second line song"
Investigator:

"Was that something the director, um, initiated or was it student initiated?"
Subject:

"Yeah"
Investigator:

"So it was director initiated, but then the students composed it…"
Subject:

"Came up with the ideas, there was definitely some input from Mr. -----, but we, came up with the base of the ideas I guess?"
Investigator:

"Ok, do you think you ever would have done that without the experience you had here?
Subject:

"No, probably not"
Investigator:

"You wouldn't have been pushed to write a second line piece…"
Subject:

"No."
Investigator:

"Alright, great. Um, I think you answered my question about number 7 about looking at music and how to play it with your books that you buy, do you do that on the internet as well?"
Subject:

"I mean, I found a couple of things, like, when I'm playing my trumpet, I usually don't find stuff online 'cause it's a lot easier to read it from a book, but like, when I'm trying to, like, when I'm just messing around on the keyboard or piano I'll just go and find something, like, 'cause that's not something I 'actually play', but when I'm messing around with it I'll go find a piece online to try and play.
Investigator:

"Do you ever listen to recordings, and like just try to like, fiddle around and figure out a melody or something, like, if there's a pop song you heard"
Subject:

"I have been known to do that, not a ton because I would honestly rather go look it up online 'cause it would take me forever to figure out, but I have been known to do that every once in a while "

Investigator:

"Alright, so one of the slider things you did, slid up to number 4, how different the music you make at home is from school, can you give me any specifics on why you put the slider there? What particular elements of each style of music?"

Subject:

"I mean, like, with concert band, that's like… the music I play at home is more like, I found, like , I have a Taylor Swift book, Disney books, and Phantom of the Opera, those are all vastly different from the stuff we play, in regular band and jazz band, even"

Investigator:

"Do you think that that's a good thing, that it's vastly different?"

Subject:

"I think it is because then I broaden my horizons on more music that I might eventually want to actually play for something like, we do a pops concert and we have popular music in it that people would know and like, that's cool, something cool to play, like if I found something I liked so…."

Investigator:

"Alright, and uh, so far, this is the last question I have. So you mentioned for question 12 about your experience in jazz band, you feel it's more 'free and expressive', so can you elaborate on that a little more?"

Subject:

"Well with concert band you have what's written on the page, that's what you play, you're with, there's me and then there's 11 other trumpets. We all have to play the same thing, we have to play the same way, and like, you play what's written on the page, how it's written on the page, but then, in jazz band you go, and you can, it's not, 'this is what's written on the page, you're playing this'. You can discuss how you want it played, like, if, it's not concrete when you get the paper. There's a little bit of what you want to do. Self-expression."

Investigator:

"Ok. How about the music you make at home, is it a similar experience you have, to the jazz band experience, like, do you feel the same freedom, to, I know it's with yourself, but do you feel there's like some sort of discussion process you do with yourself on how you're going to play that kind of music?"

Subject:

"I mean, I think the music I play at home is probably similar to concert band because I want to sound like it actually sounds so it's more like… I mean that's usually how it's written on the page, but if it's not then I guess I change it a little bit, so it's kind of a bit of both"

Investigator:

"Alright, I think that'd pretty much everything, thank you so much."