MEETING THE STANDARD: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF IMPROVISATION IN THE
HIGH SCHOOL BAND PROGRAM

by

BENITA LASHAUN GLADNEY

(Under the Direction of Mary Leglar)

ABSTRACT

American music educators have identified musical improvisation as being vital to the development of K-12 music students. For the past 18 years, the National Standards for Music Education has listed this skill as one of the nine standards for a quality music education. The purpose of this study was to describe the state of improvisation in the traditional high school band setting. The following research questions guided the study:
1) To what extent is improvisation being incorporated in concert band performance classes? 2) Do high school music educators consider themselves adequately prepared for teaching improvisation? 3) What methodologies and instructional materials are employed to teach improvisation in the concert band rehearsal? The participants were high school band directors located in states representing the Southern Division of the National Association for Music Education.

INDEX WORDS: Improvisation, high school band, teaching approaches, teacher preparation, instructional materials
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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, James and Mae D. Gladney.
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I would like to acknowledge those faculty members who served on my committee: Drs. Mary Leglar, Stephen Valdez, and Brandon Craswell. I would also like to acknowledge my family and friends, whose continued support and encouragement made this journey possible.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Musical improvisation is defined as “the creation of music in the performance” (Randel, 1986). For centuries, Western and non-Western cultures have recognized improvisation as being an essential skill in creating and performing music. “For there is scarcely a single field in music that has remained unaffected by improvisation, scarcely a single musical technique or form of composition that did not originate in improvisatory practice or was not essentially influenced by it” (Bailey, 1992). Improvisation is one of the oldest musical skills. Many of the greatest composers incorporated improvisation as one of their compositional techniques (Grout & Palisca, 1996).

Based on its historical significance and musical benefits, American music educators have identified improvisation as being a vital skill in a comprehensive music education (MENC, 1974, 1986, 1994; Sadie, 2001). The National Association for Music Education (NAFME, formerly MENC) published the first set of professional music standards in 1974. The School Music Program: Descriptions and Standards (MENC, 1974) provided music educators with a set of guidelines and standards for teaching music in the public school system. In this publication, improvisation was included on every instructional level ranging from kindergarten to ninth grade.

In 1994, 20 years after The School Music Program, MENC published another document emphasizing professional standards. This document, the National Standards for Music Education (MENC, 1994) included improvisation as one of the nine content standards. In this
document, MENC stated, “The curriculum for every student should include improvisation and composition. Many students gain considerable information about music and acquire rudimentary performing skills, but too few have ample opportunities to improvise and compose music” (p. 4).

These standards represented what students should know and be able to do after receiving a quality and comprehensive music education. Although the standards were considered voluntary, many state music associations adopted or modified them to meet their students’ educational needs. In these particular states, improvisation is generally required on every instructional level. Although many secondary instrumental music educators are teaching ensembles with limited time, increased performances, and minimum instructional materials, a number of educators are meeting this state standard (Bell, 2003). Band directors are incorporating various approaches and instructional materials to include improvisation in their classes. Unfortunately, with all the approaches and resources available, there are still a number of high school directors who rarely offer this musical skill to their students.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to describe the state of improvisation in the traditional high school band setting. The researcher focused on an overview of improvisation in the high school band, the inclusion of improvisation in the curriculum, and the teaching approaches and materials being incorporated in band classes. The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent is improvisation being incorporated in concert band performance classes?
2. Do high school music educators consider themselves adequately prepared for teaching improvisation?
3. What methodologies and instructional materials are employed to teach improvisation in the concert band rehearsal?

Need for the Study

Improvisation is a required musical skill in many states. However, it is seldom studied outside of two areas, elementary music and jazz. Unfortunately, the amount of academic research on improvisation is almost non-existent. In a recent study, Kruse, Oare and Norman (2008) examined the number of articles in three peer-reviewed journals (Journal of Research in Music Education, Council of Research in Music Education, Journal of Music Therapy) relating to the standards. They examined all standards-based articles before and after the National Standards. The results of their study indicated that improvisation articles were rarely included in these three scholarly journals.

There are very few studies and journal articles examining improvisation in the high school band setting. This researcher has not located one dissertation, thesis, or study that examined improvisation beyond a single class, school, or district. Since improvisation is a required standard in many states, this study was developed to better understand its status and role in the high school band curriculum throughout the southern region of the United States.

Significance of the Study

This study provides data that describes the state of improvisation in the high school band curriculum. The findings highlight (1) band directors’ background and training for teaching improvisation, (2) how improvisation is included in the curriculum, (3) the use of various teaching approaches (chord-scale relationships, melodic and rhythmic variations, aural), and (4)
classroom instructional materials. This study also provides music teacher education programs with data that can guide their decisions on preparing pre-service teachers for implementing improvisation in high school band programs.

**Limitations of the Study**

The participants in this study were high school band directors located in 11 states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia). These states constitute the Southern Division of the National Association for Music Education. The survey participants worked at public high schools with a student population over 1,000. School population numbers were gathered from state departments of education. Once the schools were identified, the directors’ names and email addresses were gathered from the school’s website.

**Methodology**

The purpose of the survey questionnaire was to gather information concerning the inclusion of improvisation in the high school band setting. This survey obtained information pertaining to participants’ demographics, formal training, band curricula, teaching approaches and instructional materials. Participants answered questions using various formats such as binary, multiple choice, and short answer text.

The web-based product Google Forms was selected as the survey tool. The participants received a link to the online survey. A special code/number was included on every survey. This code was provided to confirm only one response per participant. The participants’ responses were automatically downloaded to a spreadsheet.
Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides the purpose of the study, the research questions, the need for the study, the significance and limitations, and the methodology for studying high school band directors and their inclusion of improvisation in their band programs. In Chapter 2, the literature on teaching improvisation is reviewed. Chapter 3 provides the methodology, the data collection, and analysis. In Chapter 4, the findings from the study are analyzed. In Chapter 5, discussions and recommendations are provided for the study.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this study was gathered from dissertations, theses, journal articles, and books related to improvisation. The sections are categorized into the following areas: (1) studies which focused on improvisation in secondary instrumental music programs, (2) information pertaining to teacher preparation, (3) various approaches in teaching improvisation, and (4) information about the types of instructional materials designed for instrumental music.

Improvisation in Instrumental Music Education

There are a number of musical skills considered essential in achieving a comprehensive music education. American music educators and musicians have identified improvisation as one of those skills crucial to student’s musical development (MENC 1974, 1994, 2007). This skill, along with many others, has been encouraged and supported by various music organizations such as the National Association for Music Education (NAFME), National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), and numerous state music associations. Many researchers have found that the inclusion of improvisation into the curriculum has been very beneficial to student development and has brought about a practical understanding of music and musical skills (Azzara, 2002; Harbison, 1998; Hickey, 1997; Mason, 1987; Riveire, 2006; Scott, 2007).

Most of the research relating to improvisation in the secondary instrumental music setting has been explored through the experimental method. In these studies, researchers designed weekly lesson plans and/or teaching units to implement improvisation into high school band
and/or string classes. The majority of these researchers have conducted experiments using primarily a sequential teaching strategy (Bitz, 1998; Bursed, 1978; Covington, 1997; Coy, 1989; Kratus, 1991; Rowlyck, 2008; Stringham, 2010). Their studies focused on designing lessons, exercises, and activities to assess whether students could learn to improvise music through guided practice.

One of the first improvisation studies to explore sequencing in the traditional band setting was completed in the 1970s. Bursed (1978) developed an improvisation sequence for a junior high band four years after the publication of *The School Music Program: Descriptions and Standards* (MENC, 1974). The purpose of his study was to develop and evaluate a sequence that included supplementary activities and materials. Two Georgia school systems were selected and divided into three groups, one experimental \((n = 114)\) and two control groups \((n = 121\) each). The experimental group received 20 minutes of daily improvisation on scale study, call-response exercises, and free soloing. The control groups continued to receive regular band instruction. After his experiment, the results indicated that (1) students did improve in their improvisation skills, (2) improvisation did not diminish other musical skills, especially sight-reading, and (3) improvisation activities promoted positive effects on the students’ attitude.

Twenty years after Bursed’s experiment, another researcher conducted a similar study. Coy (1989) selected \((N = 60)\) students and divided them into two groups, one experimental group \((n = 30)\) and one control group \((n = 30)\). Unlike Bursed’s study, Coy administered an improvisation performance test before the experiment. This information provided baseline data about the students’ knowledge, technical skills, and prior improvisation experience. Similarly to Bursed’s study, the experimental group received 20 minutes of guided instruction with sequenced materials. The control group did not receive any instruction, but Coy provided the
instructional manual for them to practice. The students participated in the experiment for six weeks. The results indicated that the experimental group scored higher on improvisation performance and rhythmic accuracy than the control group. He concluded that while students could learn to improvise from instructional materials, they could learn to improvise in a shorter period of time if proper training was provided directly to them.

Bitz (1998) was another researcher who developed sequential materials for his study. However, his material was based on the teaching strategies of eight experts. The student participants were 24 middle and high school string bass players. The participants were divided into one treatment and one control group. The results of his study indicated that the treatment group that received sequencing and modeling instructions also scored significantly higher than the control group.

While there were other researchers who focused their studies on sequential materials, their findings did not always yield the same results as previous studies. For instance, Rowlyck’s (2008) study presented sequenced lessons and materials to two groups of junior high students for 18 weeks. After the experiment, four independent judges evaluated the students’ performances. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the control and treatment groups. In a related study, Stringham (2010) developed a sequential curriculum for teaching improvisation and composition in a high school setting. He discovered that including these musical skills in the class did not significantly impact its place in the overall curriculum. Improvisation and composition were still considered the weakest skills exhibited by the students.

In previous studies, the researcher was primarily the improvisation instructor implementing the activities and exercises to the students. However, there was one study that required the ensemble director to teach all aspects of the lessons. Stohlberg’s (2012) study
developed lessons specifically for the ensemble instructor to implement in the rehearsal. His lessons included short songs and exercises, approximately eight measures in length. Stohlberg explained to the teachers that they would have total control of when and how to include these activities in their curriculum. After a two-month period, his results indicated that while the students made some improvements, they would definitely need more experience, technique, and guidance in their improvisation skills.

**Teacher Preparation**

Throughout the years, music teacher education programs have trained thousands of music education majors for future positions in elementary and secondary schools. These programs have required students to enroll in numerous classes focusing on theory, history, and performance. Unfortunately, improvisation is generally not a required class for music education majors. Although the *National Standards* (MENC, 1994) and many state standards require music educators to teach improvisation, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) permits university music departments to determine if an improvisation class is offered to their students. NASM, the governing body for all accredited university music departments, “does not require or even suggest that a separate class be offered” (NASM, VIII.B.3). This policy allows music education programs to graduate future teachers from an accredited institution with little to no formal training in improvisation. Reeves (1991) and many other educators opposed this policy. He stated, “Of course, the best forum for teaching improvisation is to have a regularly scheduled separate class” (p. 65). Based on the NASM Handbook, improvisation training is the sole decision of the music department.
Music education students enroll in various courses during their undergraduate years. In one study, Stegall, Blackburn, and Coop (1978) analyzed the NASM-accredited schools’ course offerings for music education degrees. In this study, the researchers developed a competency rating to assess value in three main sections: basic musicianship, applied music, and music education methods. Of the 99 competencies in the study, 84 of them were given a score of 3.5 or higher, meaning this competency was considered valuable in music education. Although improvisation was valued below the 3.5 mark, it received a 3.35 rating in the basic musicianship category.

While there are no studies specifically on teacher preparation and improvisation, several studies have examined improvisation within the context of standards-based education. Adderly (1998) examined South Carolinas’ music teachers’ and professors’ perceptions of preparation for implementing music standards. The researcher sent one survey to faculty members at every NASM-accredited school in South Carolina and the second survey to music educators from kindergarten to 12th grade. After analyzing the results, he found that content standard #3 (improvising) was one of the weakest standards implemented in music education. Most importantly, Adderly found a significant difference between the perceptions of professors and teachers. While the professors responded positively to preparing pre-service teachers, music educators did not believe they were prepared to teach improvisation effectively.

Ten years after Adderly’s study, one recent study provided an overall picture of the state of improvisation in scholarly work. The researchers, Kruse, Oare, and Norman (2008) examined the number of articles in peer-reviewed journals relating to improvisation. Since pre-service teachers are generally required to read several journals, the results of this study were quite interesting. They reported that less than 1% of articles in the Journal of Research in Music
Education, Council of the Bulletin of Research in Music Education, and the Journal of Music Therapy related to improvisation. These researchers examined standards-based articles eight years before and nine years after the National Standards. From 1986-1995, the number of published research articles relating to improvisation was 0.65 (0.14%). During the 1996-2005 period, 2.38 (0.44%) articles related to the content standard. Unfortunately for music education, only 3.48 (0.32%) articles related to improvisation over this nineteen-year span.

Very few academic studies have explored teacher training and improvisation. However, the need for this research is evident in the number of non-scholarly articles and publications available. As Dobbins (1986) stated, “If you can’t do it, you can’t teach it (p. 14).” In the absence of academic research, various music journals have provided lessons, activities, and perspectives on how to teach improvisation on every instructional level. These journals are the Music Educators Journal, Jazz Educators Journal, and Jazz Education Network.

**MENC Fills the Gap**

Although improvisation has not been considered a priority in higher education and music teacher programs, the National Association for Music Education (NAFME) has identified improvisation as being an essential musical skill in a comprehensive education. In the organization’s original and revised professional standards publications, the School Music Program: Descriptions and Standards (MENC, 1974) and the National Standards for Music Education (MENC, 1994), and the School Music Program: A New Vision (2007), improvisation was included to provide students with opportunities to be creative with the musical knowledge and technical skills gained through formal instruction.
The *National Standards*, available since 1994, contains nine content and skill standards. Each standard provides several achievement standards that students are expected to accomplish during their elementary and secondary education. Listed below are the improvisation standards for grades 9-12:

**Content Standard:**

3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.

**Achievement Standard, Proficient:**

a. Improvise stylistically appropriate harmonizing parts

b. Improvise rhythmic and melodic variations on given pentatonic melodies

c. Improvise original melodies in a variety of styles, over given chord progressions, each in a consistent style, meter, and tonality

**Achievement Standard, Advanced:**

d. Improvise stylistically appropriate harmonizing parts in a variety of styles

e. Improvise original melodies in a variety of styles, over given chord progressions, each in a consistent style, meter, and tonality. (MENC, 1994)

In an effort to implement improvisation and the other eight standards in K-12 classrooms, MENC published a series of resource books for pre-service and in-service teachers. This series, *Strategies for Teaching* (MENC, 1994-2007) was designed to provide music educators with practical examples for implementing the *National Standards* in the classroom. An attempt to fill the gap between music teacher education programs and classroom teaching, MENC compiled a list of step-by-step strategy models that could be used on every instructional level and musical setting. A total of 11 books, with content and achievement standards, were published by the organization. Each book states:
“Each strategy is a lesson appropriate for a portion of a class session or a complete class session, including an objective, a list of necessary materials, a description of what prior student learning and experiences are expected, a set of procedures, and the indicators of success. A follow-up section identifies ways learning may be expanded” (MENC, 1999, x).

Although this series is not a teaching approach, it does offer several model lessons, ideas, and resources for including standards in the curriculum.

The first strategy book to address instrumental music was published in 1997, three years after the standards. The *Strategies for Teaching: Guide for Music Methods Classes* (1997) was specifically compiled for the college music teacher education program. Hall and Watkins (1997) state that “It provides exemplary strategies and a wealth of resources that will enable teachers of methods courses to acquaint their students with the music standards so that they will be able to incorporate them into music instruction at all levels (MENC, 1997, p. 1).” This book not only suggested additional readings, resources, and audio-visual materials, it offered numerous models for how to implement the standards in all methods courses. In the instrumental section, three achievement standards (3B, 3C, and 3E) for improvisation were included for the instrumental setting.

MENC published two band resource books specifically for including the standards in the curriculum. In these books, *Strategies for Teaching High School Band* (Kvet & Williamson, 1998) and *Strategies for Teaching Beginning and Intermediate Band* (2002), several teaching strategies provided guidance on how to teach all nine standards. Although improvisation does not receive a great deal of attention in these books, the models offered provide a basic framework for music educators to expand. This series, *Strategies for Teaching*, provided strategy models for how they could incorporate the *National Standards* in their music classroom.
Teaching Approaches

Traditionally, improvisation skills were gained through imitating other musicians. Bailey stated, “The traditional way of learning to improvise - studying with an experienced improviser in a practical way - joining him in his work (p. 123).” While this approach is still prevalent today, especially in various musical settings around the world, the majority of music education students learn to improvise and/or teach the skill after following a particular approach (Aebersold, 1967; Baker, 1990; Coker, 1990).

Many instrumental music educators rely heavily on approaches and methods to guide them through the teaching process. By following a few guidelines and/or a step-by-step plan, the educators can offer basic instructions on how to improvise (Poulter, 2004). One of the most common approaches for teaching improvisation is through the chord-scale relationship (Aebersold, 1967; Baker, 1990; Berg, 1990; Coker, 1990; Hickey, 1997; Huovinen, Tenkanen, & Kuusinen, 2011; Poulter, 2004; Meadows, 1991; Woodbury, 1989). There are literally hundreds of books, websites, and audio-visual websites that emphasize this approach (Kuzmich, 1980).

Based primarily on music theory principles, this approach emphasizes chordal patterns, diatonic and modal scales, and harmonic/chord progressions (Kuzmich, 1980). “When students outline the chords on their instruments, it helps them with ear training and the ability to hear the quality of chords (Stohlberg, 2012).” For instance, students are required to use scales and patterns to create melodic lines over various chord symbols (F7, BbM7, Dmin9#11). Students must improvise melodic material that will fit harmoniously over the harmonic progression. When students are capable of playing with scales and chords, the melody and harmony work together to achieve an interesting improvised solo (Salvatore, 1971).
Although the chord-scale approach has been practiced for years, academic researchers have not done extensive research on this topic. Fortunately, one researcher did conduct a study on the chord-scale approach. Bingham (2007) developed a teaching module combining a mixture of scales, melodies, arpeggios, and exercises. He designed 21 lesson plans and activities for middle school beginners \((N = 72)\). Through his experiment, he discovered a significant difference between the students’ pre-test and post-test scores. Although Bingham’s focus was on a particular approach, his results were very similar to other studies relating to teaching improvisation. The students improved in their skill level due to effective instruction and supporting materials.

While the chord-scale approach is probably the most commonly used in music classrooms, the oldest approach is through aural training. The aural approach, which focuses specifically on listening skills, is extremely effective in learning to improvise music (Harbison, 1988; Niemeir, 2010). Some of the most recognizable techniques are imitation, question and answer, et cetera (Campbell, 1991; Hoenack, 1971; Poulter, 2004; Tomasetti, 2003).

There are several improvisation authors who favor the aural approach over other common approaches (Aebersold, 1967; Azzara, 1999; Covington, 1997; Poulter, 2004; Priest, 2002; Toplis, 1990). For instance, Poulter (2004) created his lessons based on learning melodies by ear, sequencing of aural exercises, and call and response patterns. He believed that the aural approach was more effective in actively engaging the students in the understanding of music. Reeves (1991) provided several technical and listening improvements students would achieve through aural training. He stated, “Practicing scales, patterns, and melodic ideas by ear in all keys feeds new sounds into the ear, quickens the ear-to-finger response, develops dexterity and, when practiced slowly with a metronome on the off-beats, a surer sense of rhythm (p. 66).”
Similarly to the chord-scale approach, this approach has not received very much attention from academic researchers. However, Davison (2006) investigated the differences between aural and aural/notated modeling. He selected ($N = 76$) middle school students and separated them into two groups, one was an aural group and the other was an aural/notated group. The students participated in a 10-week treatment session. Each student received two rating scales, one before the treatment and one after the treatment session. Three music educators assessed each student’s recording session. Davison’s (2006) results indicated that the aural/notated approach would be more beneficial to students’ development. Due to the students’ previous learning experiences, he concluded that the combination of sound and sight would have a greater impact on learning to improvise.

The third most common approach is embellishing a composed melody or tune (Hickey, 1997, Hinz, 1995, Tallmadge, 1960). This approach is generally based on melodic and rhythmic variations. For instance, band students are often times encouraged to play simple songs, such as “Three Blind Mice” or “Happy Birthday.” Because the students are already familiar with the songs, they provide the melodic framework for students to learn how to embellish a simple melody (Corpolongo, 1995).

Melodic embellishments and ornamentation are generally emphasized through non-harmonic tones, guide tones, altering rhythms, changing dynamics, and adding articulations (Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Berg, 1990; Campbell, 1991; Crook, 1991; Dobbins, 1980; Field, 1977; Hinz, 1995; Poulter, 2004). Similar to the ‘Theme and Variation’ musical form, the musician embellishes the melody by adding or deleting notes, rhythms, melodic motives, and theme.
Two researchers have explored melodic and rhythmic embellishments in a school setting. Covington’s 1997 study focused on lessons and activities that required students to create a simple rhythmic phrase and melodic lines in various meters. In another study, Schroeder (2002) examined approaches based on professional musicians/teachers. These approaches focused on melodic and rhythmic variations through formal, rhythmic, and intervallic aspects of improvisation.

While there are three primary approaches to teaching improvisation, there are certain musical settings that will require a particular approach. For instance, the chord-scale approach will not be beneficial in a beginning band setting because the students have not gained enough technical skills or theoretical background. This approach will be more effective with intermediate and advanced band students. The other two approaches, melodic/rhythmic variation and aural, can be implemented on any instructional level. Throughout all of the studies presented in this document, the evidence shows that students can learn how to improvise with guided practice and instructional materials.

**Instructional Books**

The need for instructional materials for improvisation in the classroom setting is at an all-time high. (Azzara, 2002). While there are hundreds of improvisation books and materials, they are generally designed to fit into two distinct categories: elementary music and jazz. There are only a handful of books that address improvisation in a large, non-jazz, instrumental setting (Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Agrell, 2008; Brockman, 2009; Dean, 1989; Higgins & Campbell, 2010).
The majority of published books are designed for the intermediate to advanced student (Poulter, 2004). These books generally do not follow a step-by-step sequential process. The material is typically outlined as a series of exercises for the player to practice. Kuzmich (1976-2006), a noted jazz educator and composer, compiled an annotated list of instructional books and materials over a twenty-year period. In his descriptions, he provided information about the 1) level of the material, 2) teaching approach, 3) musical examples, 4) multimedia materials, 5) type of instructional (individual or class) setting, and 5) any related recordings or literature. This resource provided musicians and educators with an overview of the materials before they purchased them.

In a recent study, Bergmann (2012) also compiled a list of improvisation books and materials for teaching improvisation. In her study, she focused strictly on improvisation materials for string players. For each resource, Bergmann provided an overview that included the author’s historical background, the organization of the book, predominant scales, accompanying materials and their strengths and weaknesses.

Two researchers have examined band method books for their inclusion of the National Standards. In the following studies, the frequency of improvisation exercises was presented in the results. In Watkins’ (2011) study, beginning band method books were examined to determine the level to which they addressed national and achievement standards. She found that sixty-six percent of the method books addressed content standard #3, improvisation. In her study, Watkins also found that if the method books met one of the achievement standards for improvisation, it met at least two throughout the book.

Paschall (2006) reviewed five beginning band method books to determine how well they adhered to the National Standards. Like Watkins, she discovered that these method books
provided a very limited number of exercises devoted to improvisation. Although four of the five books included improvisation, the average number of exercises was two or three throughout the entire book. Both Watkins’ and Paschall’s studies highlight a gap in the teaching of improvisation in band method books. Because band method books do not pay any substantial amount of attention to improvisation, many band students receive minimal to no training during the introductory stage.

Fortunately, there have been a couple of music educators/authors who have created improvisation books that focus on group settings. Brockman (2009) presented a variety of improvisation activities designed to strengthen aural skills, melodic development, and harmonic understanding. He created his activities for two or more people that could be modified and implemented into a large group setting. Higgins and Campbell (2010) also created exercises for group improvisation. They created twenty exercises that can be incorporated in any musical setting, especially small or large instrumental groups.

Over the past 30 years, the amount of improvisation books and instructional materials has continued to rise. Unfortunately for band directors, the majority of these books and materials are published for the individual student. While there are hundreds of improvisation resources, the vast majority are generally jazz-related materials.

Summary

The majority of these studies have shown that improvisation, like any other music skill, can be taught effectively when the students have guided instruction and supporting materials. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of articles, dissertations, and theses relate to teaching improvisation in a secondary instrumental setting. While there is a plethora of
information pertaining to elementary or jazz improvisation, the number of resources for the band director is very limited. Although MENC has advocated for the inclusion of improvisation in teacher training, the message has not made a significant impact on academic journals, schools of music requirements, and university professors. Fortunately for music education, classroom practitioners have provided their lessons, exercises, and activities through several teaching journals.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Restatement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purposes of this study were: 1) to provide an overview of improvisation in high school band programs; 2) to identify the most prevalent approaches to teaching improvisation; and 3) to identify instructional materials included in the teaching process. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent is improvisation being incorporated in concert band performance classes?
2. Do high school music educators consider themselves adequately prepared for teaching improvisation?
3. What methodologies and instructional materials are employed to teach improvisation in the concert band rehearsal?

Participants

The participants were high school band directors located in the Southern Division of the National Association for Music Education. The Southern Division consists of 11 states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The participants were head and assistant band directors teaching in public high schools with a population of over 1,000 students.

The states’ department of education websites provided the names of the high schools. Contact information was gathered from the participants’ school and/or band websites. The
population for this study consisted of 174 high school band directors during the academic year 2012-2013. Of the 174 directors invited to participate, 74 responded, at a response rate of 43%.

**Human Subjects Approval**

An application was submitted to the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of Georgia. After an expedited review process, the Institution Review Board (IRB) committee approved the application and granted permission to begin the study in May 2013.

**Instrument**

“Questionnaire surveys allow people to respond at their convenience” (Gillham, p. 6). Fink and Kosecoff (1998) provide several advantages and disadvantages when using online survey research. A few advantages are 1) access to a large population, 2) respondents have anonymity, and 3) time and cost efficiency. Some disadvantages are 1) low response rates, 2) no in-depth answers, and 3) the design is set. In this study, the researcher created a self-designed survey instrument instead of modifying or using another researcher’s model (Creswell, 1994). The instrument was entitled the *High School Improvisation Inclusion Survey* (HSIIS).

The internet-based tool Google Docs (docs.google.com) was selected to design, collect, and analyze the data. This questionnaire tool was chosen because it 1) provided an opportunity to create a custom survey; 2) offered various question formats (binary, multiple-choice, open-ended); 3) collected the responses and compiled them in a spreadsheet; 4) allowed access from all internet connected devices (cellphone, tablet, computer); 5) provided unlimited responses; 6) compiled a summary report with pie charts; and 7) stored data safely through a password-protected system.
Design

The High School Improvisation Inclusion Survey (HSIIS) comprises 43 items (see Appendix A). The items are formatted using binary, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions. The survey instrument focused on four areas: 1) demographic information, 2) formal training in improvisation, 3) inclusion of improvisation in the band curriculum, 4) teaching approaches, and 5) instructional materials. The final section allowed the participants to offer an exercise and/or activity for including improvisation in a band setting. Absolutely no identifiable questions were asked on the survey.

The first section gathered information about the participants’ gender, age, primary instrument, number of years teaching, type and population of the participants’ undergraduate institution, and the number of band directors at their schools. The second section gathered information about their formal training in improvisation. The participants responded to questions relating to their pre-college training, formal training, preparation to teach improvisation, and undergraduate improvisation opportunities. These opportunities would have been offered in various courses such as in elementary and/or secondary methods, applied lessons, jazz improvisation, or any other course in the music department.

The third section gathered information on how and when the participants included improvisation in their band curriculum. Some of the options available were segments of a lesson, a full lesson, warm-up exercises, technical development and theory reinforcement. The fourth section asked participants to answer questions relating to their preferred approach when teaching improvisation. The chord-scale relationship, melodic and rhythmic embellishment, and aural imitation were the primary approaches available as options. If the participants used a combination of approaches, this option was available as well.
The fifth section gathered information about instructional resources. Materials such as individual or group books, software, and play-alongs were listed as options. While the Aebersold series is the most recognized play-along material, the participants could choose from other options or include another resource. The final section was an open-ended response item. This section allowed the participants to share their most effective exercise and/or activity for teaching improvisation in a large group setting.

**Procedures**

The 43-item questionnaire was revised several times. It was piloted with high school band directors \((N = 7)\) and professors \((N = 3)\). These participants were not included in the final population of this study. The directors and professors provided feedback on the length and clarity of the questionnaire. These directors were required to time themselves. The completion time ranged between 5-10 minutes.

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, the survey was sent to high school band directors in 11 states. There were 174 participants invited to participate in the study. In the invitation email, the participants received a cover letter, Participant Consent Form and URL (uniform research locator) link to the *High School Improvisation Inclusion Survey* (HSIIS). The consent form (Appendix B) informed the participants about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and the possible impact of the results. The URL link immediately directed them to the online survey.

The first survey item required the participants to enter a code. This code was provided for them in their email. This coding system was created to ensure anonymity and to determine non-responsive participants. After two weeks, a follow-up email was sent to those non-
responsive participants. One final reminder was sent to the remaining participants one week later. The survey was disabled after 30 days.

The participants’ responses were automatically downloaded into a Google Docs spreadsheet. After the survey period, the data was downloaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and transferred to the statistical software program, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). All data were stored on a password-protected computer. The researcher was the only individual to have access to the data. Once all data was collected, all identifying codes were removed from the data.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purposes of this study were: 1) to provide an overview of improvisation in high school band programs; 2) identify the most prevalent approaches to teaching improvisation; and 3) to identify instructional materials included in the teaching process. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent is improvisation being incorporated in concert band performance classes?
2. Do high school music educators consider themselves adequately prepared for teaching improvisation?
3. What methodologies and instructional materials are employed to teach improvisation in the concert band rehearsal?

Introduction

The *High School Improvisation Inclusion Survey* was separated into five sections. Section one of this study gathered demographic information about the participants. The variables addressed gender, age, instrument, teaching years, highest degree, type and population of undergraduate university, and number of band directors at present school. Section two collected data relating to the participants’ undergraduate improvisation experiences. Participants responded to questions pertaining to their formal and informal training during undergraduate school. In section three, participants were asked to provide information on how they included improvisation in their traditional band classes. Section four gathered data on the most prevalent
improvisation approaches incorporated in their lessons. The participants responded to questions relating to melodic construction and foundational materials. The final section collected data about instructional materials and resources participants use when teaching improvisation.

**Section 1: Background Information**

The survey items in this section gathered data about the participants’ age, gender, instrument, etc. Survey item one collected data about their gender. This question was designed to determine the percentages of male and female directors on the high school level. The results show that 89.2% of the participants were male and the remaining 10.8% were female. Although no definitive data is available on the number of male and female high school band directors, historically this position has been male dominated. Survey item two addressed the participants’ age. In Table 1, the results illustrate the frequency and percentages of participants’ ages. The numbers were fairly distributed throughout the group. The majority of participants ranged between the ages of 31 and 48.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39-48</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 and older</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey item three asked the participants to indicate their primary instrument. The most common response was brass (55.4%), followed by woodwinds (27%), and then percussion (17.6%). Although musicians playing other instruments (strings, voice, piano, guitar, etc.) have been hired as band directors, no participants in this study indicated other instruments as their primary instrument. In survey item four, the participants were asked to indicate the number of years they have taught music. The teaching experiences of the participants ranged between 1 and 21+ years. In Table 3, the results show the majority of participants (69%) have 11+ years of teaching experience. The largest percentages are related to band directors with 11-15 years (28%) and over 21 years (27%). Although the frequency and percentages are not evenly distributed, a fair number of participants were represented in this study.

Table 2

Distribution of Years of Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey item five collected data on the highest degree achieved by the participants. The results show that a large majority (64%) of participants have obtained a master’s degree. Thirty-one percent of the participants have a bachelor’s degree. While doctoral degrees are on the rise,
only 5% of the participants have obtained this degree. Survey items six and seven asked participants about their undergraduate universities. The vast majority (88%) of the participants graduated from public institutions, while the remaining 12% graduated from private schools.

This number is not surprising since the majority of colleges and universities in the United States are public. The participants in this study attended colleges and universities of varying sizes. Table 3 shows that the populations of the universities were fairly distributed among the sizes. For this item, the majority of participants (65%) attended schools with less than 20,000 students.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population of University</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10,000</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-20,000</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-30,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 30,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final survey item for section one asked the participants to indicate the number of band directors in their current schools. The results show that 54% of participants worked at schools with two band directors. Since many of the schools in this study had a population of 1,000+ students, this number is average for high school band positions. Some of the participants (30%) are the sole directors at their school. The remaining 16% work at schools with three (8%) or four (8%) directors.
Section II: Teacher Training

Music majors are generally required to audition on their primary instruments. They are expected to enter college music programs with at least an intermediate to advanced level of various musical skills. For survey item nine, the participants provided information about their pre-college improvisation training. The results indicated that 78% of participants entered college without any improvisation skills. Of the various skills (listening, reading, performing, etc.) students should possess when entering a college music program, only 22% of the participants reported being skilled in improvisation before attending school.

Survey item ten asked participants about their undergraduate music department and whether an improvisation course was offered to them. The results indicate that the responses were evenly distributed on this survey item. About half of the participants (47%) reported their school did not offer an improvisation course, while 43% attended schools that offered such a course. This data does not describe whether the class was designed for jazz students, music education majors, or other music students. These results show that almost half of the music programs, during the participants’ enrollment, offered this course to their students. The remaining 10% of the participants could not remember this information.

For survey item eleven, participants provided information about their music education degree requirements. Music education majors are required to take a variety of courses in music, education, and general studies. In Table 5, the results indicate that many music teacher education programs do not require separate improvisation courses for their students. A very small percentage of the participants graduated from an institution that required an improvisation course.
Table 4

*Music Education Degree Requiring an Improvisation Course*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Requirement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey item twelve asked the participants to indicate the amount of improvisation training they received in their music education programs. For this item, participants were not required to indicate whether the training was formal or informal. The data shows that 54% of the band directors responded that they received “some training” during their undergraduate years. Since “some” can be considered very broad, there is no data to determine if “some” meant three 5-minute lessons in one course or ten sessions in another class. Thirty-nine percent reported receiving absolutely “no training.” The remaining 7% reported receiving “extensive training” during undergraduate school.

While many music education students may learn how to improvise, they are not necessarily instructed on how to teach the information in a group setting. For survey item thirteen, participants were asked to report if they received training on how to teach improvisation in certain courses. Table 5 shows the courses students generally receive some improvisation instruction. While 43% of the participants reported having no formal classroom training, the remaining 57% received their training in a variety of courses.

Although secondary methods specifically prepares music education students for teaching in middle and high school settings, only 5% of the participants reported receiving training on improvisation pedagogy. Surprisingly, only one of the participants selected elementary methods
as a choice. This course generally provides several mini lessons on how to teach improvisation using recorders and bar instruments. The option “other” was offered to represent a variety of courses (e.g., jazz or related ensemble, vocal class, theory, etc.) because improvisation can be included in any music course.

Table 5

*Frequency and percentages of courses with an improvisation component.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Courses</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Methods</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Methods</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation Course</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Lesson</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Course Included</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Do Not Remember</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey item fourteen asked the participants to indicate whether they felt adequately prepared after graduation to teach improvisation in a band setting. These results illustrate the difference between those participants who felt prepared or unprepared to teach the skill. Table 6 shows that approximately three-fourths of the participants did not feel adequately prepared to teach improvisation in a band setting.
Table 6

Participants’ responses to their improvisation training preparation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adequately Prepared</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For survey item fifteen, the participants answered a hypothetical question about whether they would enroll in an improvisation course if they could choose their electives again. The results show that the majority of the participants (86%) would enroll in an improvisation course. Table 7 illustrates the frequency and percentages of the responses. This data suggests that band directors did not realize the importance of this skill until after they graduated from school.

Table 7

Participants’ responses to choosing an improvisation course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elective Choice</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the final item in this section, survey item sixteen collected data from those participants who reported receiving no formal instruction on how to improvise. This item examined the informal training practices of the participants. Although many of the participants indicated that they received training, the difference between personal training and classroom instruction is not available in the data. The item focused specifically on individual musical development, not
pedagogy. Over half (54%) of the respondents indicated that they taught themselves how to improvise music. The remaining 46% is divided between participants who took private lessons (17%) and those who reported that they do not know how to improvise (29%).

**Section III: Improvisation in the Curriculum**

In many states, improvisation is a state standard. Survey item seventeen collected data on the number of participants that include improvisation in their band curriculum. Forty (54%) participants responded that improvisation was included in their curriculum. The remaining 46% do not include the skill.

For survey item eighteen, the participants selected their primary reason for including the musical skill. Thirty-two (43%) participants responded that they do not include improvisation. This percentage differs slightly from the previous answer of 46%. For this item, two of the participants altered their responses about curriculum inclusion. Table 8 illustrates the responses for all five categories. The lowest rated option was the “National or State Standard.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Including Improvisation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National or State Standard</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Skill in Musical Development</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforces Theory and Musical Skills</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Interested in Learning</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Do Not Include</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While teaching improvisation to an individual and/or small group is common, presenting this skill to a large group of students can be quite challenging. Survey item nineteen specifically examined the participants’ comfort level for teaching improvisation in a large group setting. The data show that 41% of the participants do not feel comfortable teaching improvisation in a large setting. For the remaining 59%, twenty-one (28%) of the participants felt “very comfortable”, 26% felt “somewhat comfortable,” and 5% indicated that they were “petrified.”

Survey item twenty asked the participants to indicate how improvisation was being included in the band class. The options included a “segment of a lesson,” “ear-training activities,” “warm-up exercises,” and “theory reinforcement.” For this item, participants were allowed to provide multiple answers. Sixty percent of the participants combined several of the options to describe how they incorporated the skill. This data illustrates the flexibility in a band director’s improvisation instruction. For this item, the options “segment of a lesson” and “warm-up exercises” received the most responses. Since school bands are constantly preparing for upcoming performances, it was not surprising that full-period lessons received the lowest response rate.

For survey item twenty-one, the participants provided information on what the other band students were required to do while a band student is improvising. Since the participants were allowed to select multiple options, several responses were given. The results show that requiring students to listen (30%) and having them provide accompaniment (27%) received similar responses. For this question, 20% of the participants combined all three (listening, accompanying, and evaluating) selections. The remaining percentages are related to those participants who selected “not applicable.”
Participants were asked to indicate the approximate amount of time improvisation is included in a traditional band class. Table 9 illustrates the frequency and percentages pertaining to the time allotment for improvisation. Although many of the previous responses suggest that directors are including improvisation in their classes, this survey item provides a numerical summary of how many directors are actually implementing this skill in their classes. For this item, 51% of the responses range from “5-30 minutes a week” to “infrequently throughout the year.”

Table 9
*Amount of Improvisation Time Allotted in the Traditional Band Class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Time Allotted</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-30 minutes a week</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-30 minutes a month</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequently during one semester</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrequently throughout the year</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improvisation in high school band programs is generally associated with small ensembles (jazz or related groups). In these programs, many students are offered several alternative courses or after-school ensembles to expand their musical development. In survey item twenty-three, the participants responded to the question of whether they taught improvisation in other band rehearsals. The results show 78% of the participants reported teaching improvisation in another band setting. The remaining 22% is divided between “no” (14%) and “not applicable” (8%).
For survey item twenty-four, the participants responded to the question, “Do you generally equate teaching improvisation with teaching jazz?” All of the participants completed this survey item. The results indicate that 86% of respondents reported equating teaching improvisation to teaching jazz. This supports the previous survey item indicating the high percentage (78%) of participants teaching improvisation in other bands.

For survey item twenty-five, those participants who do not include improvisation in their band classes were asked to indicate the primary reason. The participants were allowed to select multiple answers to express their reasoning for not including improvisation. Five options were presented to the participants: 1) not enough time to teach, 2) not significant enough to the curriculum, 3) limited teaching resources, 4) inadequately prepared to teach, and 5) other. The option of “not enough time to teach” received the largest response rate.

Section IV: Teaching Improvisation

There are various approaches to teaching improvisation. Band directors have presented this skill through the chord-scale relationship, melodic and/or rhythmic embellishments, playing by ear (aural approach) or imitation, and by a combination of each approach. Survey item twenty-six gathered data on the preferred approach the participants used for teaching improvisation. For this item, only 70 participants responded to this question. In table 11, the results indicate that 40% of the directors are teaching students to improvise through a combination of approaches. These results are not surprising since directors are constantly attempting to reach all of their students during the lesson. Although the chord-scale relationship received 28% of the responses, this data shows that band directors are not necessarily attached to one way of teaching this skill.
Table 10

*Responses for preferred improvisation approach reasons*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvisation Approaches</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chord-Scale Relationship</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melodic Embellishment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aural</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of Approaches</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Improvisation is generally constructed by creating melodic or harmonic ideas. In survey item twenty-seven, the participants indicated their approach when presenting melodic ideas to the students. The participants reported that using a “combination of approaches” (32%) is the most popular course of action. For the remaining percentages, the chord-scale relationship received 22%, melodic embellishment 15%, and aural 7%. Twenty-four percent of the responses selected “not applicable.”

Survey item twenty-eight gathered data on what types of foundational materials band directors included for teaching improvisation. For this question, participants could choose multiple answers. Based on the results, the blues progression appears to be the most prevalent material. This particular progression received 32% of the participants’ responses. Chord progressions were a close second with 29% of the responses. Participants also included folksongs (5%), nursery rhymes (8%), and patriotic songs (3%) as materials for improvisation. Sixteen (21.6%) selected “not applicable” and 6.8% responded “all of the above.”
When teaching improvisation, a tonal organization is generally incorporated to provide stability to the melodic lines. For survey item twenty-nine, the participants were asked to indicate which tonal organization was included when teaching improvisation. The results show that 42% of the participants incorporated the blues scale. This particular response relates directly to the previous survey item pertaining to foundational materials. The major/minor scales received the 22% of the responses. The participants also indicated using modal scales (12%) and other scales (1%) for the tonal organization. The remaining 23% selected “not applicable.”

Survey item thirty collected data on which chord progressions participants introduced first to their students. The participants indicated the blues progression (42%) as the most popular chord progression for teaching improvisation. The I-IV-V-I was the next popular progression with a total of 20% of the participants selecting this choice. The participants selected other progressions such as ii-V-I (7%), I-V (1%) and other (3%) as their first choice. For this item, 27% of the participants selected “not applicable.”

Although improvisation is generally associated with jazz and blues, this musical skill is practiced and performed in many styles and genres. Survey item thirty-one gathered data on whether students were required to improvise in a variety of styles. The results show that 46% of the participants require their students to improvise in various musical styles. It is surprising this number is low compared to the number of participants (78%) directing jazz bands. For this item, the remaining participants either do not require it (34%) or the question is “not applicable” (20%). The final item in this section, survey item thirty-two, asked the participants to indicate whether the students were required to improvise in various meters. The results show that 34% of the participants require their students to improvise in various meters, while 46% do not and 20% selected “not applicable.”
Section V: Teaching Materials

There are hundreds of instructional books on improvisation. The majority of these books are designed for individual and/or small group settings. Unfortunately, there are only a handful of books designed specifically for teaching improvisation in high school group ensembles. The next group of questions gathered data on what instructional materials the participants are incorporating in their classes.

For survey item thirty-three, participants responded to whether they included published materials when teaching improvisation. The results show that almost half (47%) of all participants include published materials in their classes. The other participants were divided between not including materials (31%) and “not applicable” (22%). For those participants that indicated they did include materials, survey item thirty-four asked them to input the title. There were only twenty-nine responses for this item. The participants overwhelming selected the Jamey Aebersold series as the most prominent material for teaching improvisation. Although there are many improvisation books available to directors, 94% of the titles presented were directly related to jazz.

Survey item thirty-five gathered data on whether directors used individual or group designed instructional books in their classes. The results were evenly split between individual (26%) and group (28%). The remaining participants selected “not applicable” (46%). Due to the limited number of improvisation books designed for the large group, this number is not surprising.

For survey item thirty-six, the participants responded to whether they modified or arranged book exercises for their bands. The responses were evenly split on this question. A total of 36% selected yes while 37% selected no. Since the question did not specifically relate to
improvisation, these exercises could be arranged for any musical development. The remaining participants (27%) selected “not applicable.” Survey item thirty-seven asked participants to indicate if they required students to improvise exercises from the band method book. Fifteen (21%) participants require their students to improvise book exercises. The remaining percentages were divided between “no” (53%) and “not applicable” (26%).

A variety of teaching materials have become available to directors in the past 40 years. Many authors, inventors, and musicians have published audio and visual materials to aid teachers in the teaching process. Along with hundreds of books, there are a number of technological options for directors to incorporate in their classes. Survey item thirty-eight examines whether the participants include play-along recordings or music software to teach improvisation. In table 11, the results show that the majority of participants (64%) use play-alongs.

Table 11

*Participants’ responses for usage of technological materials*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technological Teaching Resources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, play-along</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, play-along and software</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although play-alongs have been available since the 1960s, there are only a few companies that produce recording series. Survey item thirty-nine collected data on the preferred play-along series when teaching improvisation. The Jamey Aebersold series (48.6%) was selected as their
preferred play-along series. These results are directly related to survey item thirty-four. This series appears to be the most popular material for teaching improvisation.

While play-alongs have been around for decades, music software is becoming a viable option in the classroom. For those participants who indicated they included software, survey item forty results show 63% of them use “Smartmusic” as their preferred teaching software. The remaining participants were divided between “iReal Book” (20%), “Band in a Box” (12%) and other (5%). Survey item forty-one asked participants to indicate which established improvisation books have been included in their preparation or teaching. For this item, only 20 participants responded to this question. From the list, Oliver Nelson’s *Patterns for Improvisation*, Jerry Coker’s *Complete Methods for Improvisation*, and Christopher Azzara’s *Developing Musicianship through Improvisation* received the most responses.

For survey item forty-two, the participants provided their most effective exercise and/or activity they use for teaching improvisation in a traditional large group rehearsal. Listed below are a few of the open-ended responses.

1. There are two primary improvisational exercises that I use. The first is tied to solfege instruction. Before asking students to improvise, we teach solfege syllables, scale degrees, no syllables, and melodic imitation. From there, we ask students to improvise on their own. Without this preliminary instruction, we call it musical wondering. The other exercise involves providing students with parameters: key, style, note denominations, phrase length, etc. and have them pass improvised melodies around the room.

2. In concert band, we mainly use nursery rhymes for ear training then we move on to major/minor scales for improvisation and technical development.
3. I rarely teach improvisation in the large band rehearsal. Most of my improvisation is rhythm based. We also use some basic 5 note scales.

4. Using a simple nursery rhyme and having students embellish the melodies typically just one phrase at a time to begin and gradually increase the length of the improvisation. I have found that most kids are capable of doing a simple improvisation for 2 or 4 measures.

5. I generally pick a Blues song and have the students use a pentatonic scale to improvise.

6. The most effect method for teaching improvisation with our high school musicians is through blues and other forms that allow student to use one or two scales while doing an exercise. When students get more comfortable, we move on to more complex progressions, etc.

7. Call and response is a great way for students to build vocabulary of licks while learning to play stylistically appropriate inflections, articulations, and time.

8. Improvise melody on the warm-up chorales

9. Focusing on various ways to embellish melodies. First learn the tune “straight.” Then model the following ways to vary: 1. repetition of a motive from the melody 2. adding syncopations 3. adding chromatic approaches 4. filling in melodic thirds with passing tones. Students focus on one at a time, then combine several of these ideas.

10. Call and response and the EVERYBODY SOLO at the same time
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purposes of this study were: 1) to provide an overview of improvisation in high school band classes; 2) to identify the most prevalent approaches to teaching improvisation; and 3) to identify instructional materials included in the teaching process. This discussion section focuses on the three research questions that guided this study:

1. To what extent is improvisation being incorporated in traditional band performance classes?
2. Do high school band directors consider themselves adequately prepared for teaching improvisation?
3. What approaches/methodologies and instructional materials are employed to teach improvisation in the traditional band rehearsal?

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question (1): To what extent is improvisation being incorporated in the traditional band class?

The extent to which improvisation is being incorporated is evident in the variety of activities and exercises. Several research studies have found that when improvisation activities were included in secondary instrumental music classes, students improved in their listening skills, theoretical understanding, and performance techniques (Azzara, 2002; Burnsed, 1978; Hickey, 1997, Scott, 2007). The participants in this study presented improvisation activities/
exercises during segments of class lessons, transitional material, warm-up exercises, ear-training practice, theory supplements, and technical development. For instance, one of the participants has his students to improvise the melody of the warm-up chorale. This basic activity offers students an opportunity to improvise during band class, but more importantly, it demonstrates to the students that any musical piece can be improvised.

During these activities, the participants are including progressions and tunes for foundational material. For instance, the blues progression appears to be very popular for improvisation training. This simple 12-bar progression, along with the blues scale, is the most widely used material for learning how to improvise (Baker, 1990). Many of the directors also use simple and familiar melodies when teaching improvisation. They have discovered that familiar tunes provide a sense of stability during the beginning stages of improvisation. A large number of these directors have also incorporated full band participation during improvisation instruction. These directors require the other band students to 1) listen to the soloist, 2) provide accompaniment, and 3) evaluate the performance. By incorporating these musical skills, directors are providing opportunities for all of their students to participate in the musical experience.

In this study, the participants responded to several questions pertaining to how they included improvisation. In order to truly determine the extent to which improvisation is being incorporated in the traditional band class, time spent on the activity must be measured. The amount of time directors devote to teaching musical skills, especially improvisation, provides a clear picture of how important it is in the curriculum. In this study, 19% of the participants responded that improvisation was included for 5-30 minutes a week. Since this study did not inquire about the breakdown of instructional time, high school band students could be receiving
improvisation instruction at least 5 minutes a day or 30 minutes once a week. For all of the other respondents, they include improvisation once a month (3%), infrequently throughout the semester (11%) and throughout the year (19%). Unfortunately, 49% of the participants do not include it in the large group setting. Some of the reasons provided were: 1) not enough time to teach, 2) limited teaching resources (Pashcall, 2006; Watkins, 2011), 3) director is inadequately prepared to teach (Adderly, 1998), and 4) improvisation is not significant enough to the curriculum. Although the participants reported what they were doing to teach this skill, the data on how often it was implemented provided a more accurate measurement.

Further research is needed to assess how well band directors are addressing this musical standard in their classes. Since the *National Standards for Music Education* was published in 1994 (MENC, 1994), and many state music association adopted similar standards, the assumption would be that directors are teaching all of their students how to read, perform, improvise, etc. Based on the results of this study, a large number of high school band students are not receiving improvisation instruction. For example, 100% of the participants ranging between 22 and 30 years of age responded that they were not skilled in improvisation when they entered college. Although the *National Standards* were available during their high school years, these participants graduated without learning how to improvise.

In order to improve the quality of high school instrumental music education, future research of directors’ practices and opinions should be examined. Further studies will also provide information to other band directors on how to teach improvisation in a large group setting. As one director stated, “I do not teach improvisation at my level. I would, however, love to receive the results of this study, so that in the future, if I do teach improvisation, I will have some resources that I can look into.”
Research Question (2): Do high school music educators consider themselves adequately prepared for teaching improvisation?

Music teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers to teach students ranging from kindergarten through 12th grade. These future teachers are required to enroll in various courses designed to strengthen their individual musical abilities and teaching experiences. In this study, participants with less than 15 years of teaching experience graduated from a music teacher education program that was familiar with the goals and objectives of the National Standards for Music Education (MENC, 1994).

In this study, the participants were asked if they felt adequately prepared to teach improvisation. The results show that 72% responded that they did not feel adequately prepared to teach improvisation in a traditional band setting. The results of this study support findings in previous studies related to the preparation of music education students. In Pietra and Campbell’s study (1995), secondary methods students at one university were being instructed to listen to improvisation and analyze it, but they were never taught how to do it or teach it. In Adderly’s study (1998), he found that South Carolina’s music educators considered improvisation their weakest standard. These educators indicated that they were not prepared to teach improvisation effectively. This major gap in the teaching and preparation process has contributed to the 72% response of not feeling adequately prepared.

Based on the data, 78% of the participants entered college with no improvisation skills and 57% of them graduated without receiving any formal improvisational training. These results illustrate that the National Standards for Music Education (MENC, 1994) never really made a significant impact on music teacher education programs. A surprising result in this study was the percentage of directors teaching improvisation in another band class. Seventy-eight percent of
the participants reported teaching improvisation in jazz, salsa or other bands. Unfortunately, this study did not determine whether they felt comfortable teaching improvisation in those settings.

For pre-service teachers to be prepared and comfortable with teaching skills, they must have numerous opportunities to practice this skill during undergraduate training. Although 43% of the participants graduated from a school that offered an improvisation course, 95% of the participants were not required to enroll in an improvisation course for degree completion. Sixty-one percent of the participants responded that they received some improvisation training in college. For those directors who did not receive formal training, they either taught themselves or took private lessons.

Further research is needed to determine a more approximate number of high school band directors who feel adequately prepared to teach improvisation in a traditional band class. This data suggest that many music education students are graduating without learning how to improvise or how to teach it. If 86% of the participants indicated that if they could choose their elective again they would enroll in an improvisation course, this statistic clearly shows that they feel more training was necessary in order to feel more comfortable. Based on their responses, music teacher education programs should consider requiring a specialized course in improvisation for pre-service teachers.

Research Question (3): What approaches/methodologies and instructional materials are employed to teach improvisation in the concert band rehearsal?

There are four primary approaches to learning or teaching improvisation. The most common is the chord-scale relationship (Abersold, 1967; Berg, 1990; Meadow, 1991; Stohlberg, 2012; Woodbury, 1989). This approach works very well in the high school band setting due to
the director’s emphasis on daily scale and arpeggio practice. The other approaches generally used for teaching improvisation are melodic embellishment (Hickey, 1997; Hinz, 1995), rhythmic variation (Covington, 1997), and the aural (Azzara, 1999; Davison, 2006; Priest, 2002).

It appears that high school band directors are open to a variety of approaches when teaching improvisation. In this study, 39% of the respondents indicated that they combine several approaches when presenting improvisation to their students. Since this study did not ask the participants to indicate their preferred combination, a further examination is needed to provide a more in-depth description of common practices.

Within their preferred approaches, the participants answered survey items pertaining to 1) How melodic ideas were presented? 2) What types of foundational materials included in the session? 3) Which tonal organization and chord progression are incorporated first? The final section offered an open-ended section that allowed participants to provide improvisation exercises and activities frequently used in their classes. Although the vast majority of responses were jazz-related, this data reinforces the answers provided in question twenty-four concerning the equation of teaching improvisation to teaching jazz.

**Instructional Materials**

Improvisation is widely considered an aural art. Although resources are helpful, the use of published materials (books, sheet music, etc.) is definitely not a requirement for learning how to improvise or teaching others how to do it. While there are improvisation books designed for group settings (Brockman, 2009; Higgins and Campell, 2010), the majority of published materials are specifically related to jazz or blues improvisation.
In this study, those participants who included improvisation in their traditional band classes incorporated published materials. The three most prevalent improvisation books participants indicated in their responses were Coker’s *Complete Method for Improvisation*, Nelson’s *Patterns for Improvisation*, and Grunow and Arraza’s *Developing Musicianship through Improvisation*. These books, along with countless others, provide directors with a foundation for teaching students the principles of improvisation.

Play-along recordings have been included in many high school band programs for years. In the past four decades, the increase in play-along materials has made it possible for directors to add an additional aural component to their lessons. While play-along recordings are the most widely used technology for teaching improvisation, many directors also use computer software to teach the skill. According to the data, Smartmusic is the most popular software. This internet-based program provides students with hundreds of exercises and musical pieces for technical development. The jazz component allows the students to practice scale/chord patterns with accompaniment, call and response exercises, and melodic and rhythmic variations of given melodies. With the expansion of smartphones and tablets, technological devices are providing various ways to practice improvisation.

Further research is needed to examine how band directors are incorporating these technological resources in their classes. The data will provide a better understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of using technology in a large and/or small group setting. Although the number of books, play-alongs, recordings, and software is at an all-time high (Azzara, 2002), the data show that some participants are not including it in their classes. However, as instructional technology continues to develop, band directors will find opportunities to include it into their curriculum.
CLOSING

Improvisation is one of the oldest musical skills. While it has been deemed an important skill for musical development, very little research have examined its role in the high school band setting. In order for high school band directors to meet the needs of their students, they must 1) be trained to teach every musical skill, 2) know how to include the skill in every instrumental ensemble, 3) be aware of several approaches for teaching improvisation, and 4) be familiar with various instructional resources. This study has provided some insight into the state of improvisation in high school bands. Overall, the data show that music education majors need more improvisation training during undergraduate school so they can feel confident when implementing the skill in their future classrooms. Continued research in this area will offer results that will prompt scholars, professors, and authors to provide more information, activities, and materials on how to effectively teach improvisation in all musical settings.

Implications for Music Education

1. Secondary methods courses should include an improvisation component (unrelated to jazz) in the lectures and lab portions of the class. By doing this, music education students have an opportunity to observe and practice implementing improvisation in a traditional band setting. For example, basic improvisation exercises and activities may be included in the course as warm-up or transitional materials.

2. Music teacher education programs can encourage their students to enroll in an improvisation course during their first year. This course will provide opportunities for students to practice theory and aural exercises through performance.
3. The music education and jazz studies department can collaborate to create a class specifically for music education majors. In this course, the students will learn how to improvise and then how to create exercises and activities for a small and large band program.

4. During state music conferences, the governing associations should offer several improvisation clinics for middle and high school band directors. For those directors with limited knowledge of improvisation, these clinics and workshops could provide them with contact numbers, websites, lessons, and instructional materials that they can use in their classes.

5. Music departments can offer an improvisation course specifically designed for band directors during the summer. This course can cover materials that can be included in large band classes and other ensembles (jazz, rock, salsa, etc.)

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Further research is needed due to the limitations of this study. The following recommendations are based on the results of this study and the current literature.

1. A study of the status of improvisation instruction should be conducted by every state. A survey can be distributed to members of the state music association. In order for music education organizations (district, state, and federal) to determine how well we are teaching any skill, we must ask in-service teachers or observe them in the field. Once data are collected and analyzed, the information can be forwarded to music teacher education programs in that state and changes can be made with the next generation of music educators.
2. Since many of the participants indicated that they thought teaching improvisation equated to teaching jazz, future studies should examine in-service and pre-service teacher’s perceptions of improvisation in the band curriculum. This qualitative study can provide a more in-depth description of the opinions and biases toward teaching improvisation.

3. Future researchers can investigate the effectiveness of using technology when teaching improvisation. This future study can examine technological devices to determine the effectiveness of the design for helping students progress on their instruments.
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APPENDIX A

High School Improvisation Inclusion Survey

Code - Located in Email

1. Gender
   a. Female  b. Male

2. Age
   a. 22-30  b. 31-38  c. 39-48  d. 49-60  e. 61 and older

3. Primary Instrument

4. Number of Teaching Years
   a. 1-5  b. 6-10  c. 11-15  d. 16-20  e. 21+

5. Highest Degree
   a. Bachelor  b. Masters  c. Doctorate

6. Type of Undergraduate University
   a. Private  b. Public

7. Population of Undergraduate University
   a. Less than 10,000  b. 10,000-20,000  c. 20,000-30,000  d. More than 30,000

8. Number of band directors at your school
   a. 1  b. 2  c. 3  d. 4

9. Were you skilled in improvisation before entering college?
   a. Yes  b. No

10. My university music department offered a course specifically related to improvisation or teaching improvisation.
    a. Yes  b. No  c. I do not remember
11. My music education degree required a course emphasizing improvisation.
   a. Yes   b. No   c. I do not remember

12. During undergraduate work, please indicate the amount of training you received in
    improvisation.
    a. Extensive training   b. Some training   c. No training

13. I received training on how to teach improvisation in this course(s). (multiple
    answers allowed)
    a. Elementary methods
    b. Secondary methods
    c. Improvisation course
    d. Applied lesson
    e. No course included improvisation
    f. I do not remember
    g. Other

14. After graduation, did you feel adequately prepared to teach improvisation in a band
    setting?
    a. Yes   b. No

15. If you could choose your undergraduate curricular electives again, would you enroll
    in an improvisation course?
    a. Yes   b. No

16. If you did not receive formal training, did you teach yourself or take private lessons
    on how to improvise?
    a. Self-taught   b. Private lessons   c. I do not know how to improvise

17. Do you include improvisation in the band curriculum?
    a. Yes   b. No

18. What is your primary reason for including improvisation?
    a. National or state standard
    b. Important skill in musical development
    c. Reinforces theory and musical skills
    d. Students are interested in learning the skill
    e. I do not include improvisation

19. How comfortable do you feel teaching improvisation in a large group setting?
    a. Very comfortable
    b. Somewhat comfortable
    c. Not comfortable
    d. Petrified
20. How do you include improvisation in your band classes? (multiple answers allowed)
   a. Full-period lesson
   b. Segment of a lesson
   c. Warm-up exercises
   d. Transitional material
   e. Theory supplement
   f. Ear training activities
   g. Technical development
   h. Improvisation not included
   i. Other

21. What are the other band students doing when a student is improvising? (multiple answers allowed)
   a. N/A
   b. Providing accompaniment
   c. Listening
   d. Evaluating the performance
   e. Other

22. Indicate the approximate amount of time improvisation is included in the large group traditional band rehearsal?
   a. None
   b. 5-30 minutes a week
   c. 5-30 minutes a month
   d. Infrequently during one semester
   e. Infrequently throughout the year

23. Do you teach improvisation in any other band rehearsal (jazz, salsa, rock, etc.)?
   a. N/A   b. Yes   c. No

24. Do you generally equate teaching improvisation with teaching jazz?
   a. Yes   b. No

25. If you do not include improvisation, why? (multiple answers allowed)
   a. Not enough time to teach
   b. Limited teaching resources for a band setting
   c. Inadequately prepared to teach
   d. Not significant enough to the curriculum
   e. Other

26. What is your preferred approach to teaching improvisation?
   a. N/A
   b. Chord-scale relationship
   c. Melodic embellishment
   d. Rhythmic variation
e. Aural - (imitation of improvised line, call and response, etc.)
f. Combination of the above

27. When presenting melodic ideas, I generally use this approach.
   a. N/A
   b. Chord-scale relationship
   c. Melodic embellishment
   d. Aural - (imitation of improvised line, call and response, etc.)
   e. Combination of the above

28. What do you use as foundational material? (multiple answers allowed)
   a. N/A
   b. Folksongs
   c. Nursery rhymes
   d. Patriotic songs
   e. Blues progression
   f. Chord progressions
   g. All of the above
   h. Other

29. What tonal organization is primarily used when teaching improvisation?
   a. N/A
   b. Major/Minor
   c. Modal
   d. Pentatonic
   e. Blues
   f. Other

30. What chord progression do you teach first?
   a. N/A
   b. I - V
   c. I - IV - V - I
   d. ii - V - I
   e. Blues progression
   f. Other

31. Are the students required to improvise in a variety of styles?
   a. N/A   b. Yes   c. No

32. Are student required to improvise in a variety of meters?
   a. N/A   b. Yes   c. No

33. Do you include published materials when teaching improvisation?
   a. N/A   b. Yes   c. No

34. Is so, what is the primary material?
35. Are the instructional books generally designed for individual or group study?
   a. N/A  b. Individual  c. Group

36. Do you modify or arrange book exercises for your bands?
   a. N/A  b. Yes  c. No

37. Do you ever have students improvise exercises from the band method book?
   a. N/A  b. Yes  c. No

38. In teaching improvisation, do you ever include play-alongs and/or software?
   a. N/A  
   b. Yes, play-alongs  
   c. Yes, play-alongs and software  
   d. No

39. If so, which play-along series do you prefer?
   a. Aebersold play-along  
   b. Alfred play-along  
   c. Hal Leonard play-along  
   d. Other

40. If so, which software application do you prefer?
   a. Smartmusic  
   b. Band in a Box  
   c. iReal book  
   d. Other

41. Have you used any of these books in teaching improvisation? (multiple answers allowed)
   a. Complete Methods for Improvisation - Coker
   b. How to Improvise: for all instruments - Applebaum
   c. Improviser’s Guide to Melodic Embellishment
   d. Developing Musicianship through Improvisation
   e. Pattern for Improvisation - Nelson
   f. Group Improvisation: The Manual of Ensemble Improv Games
   g. Improvisation Games for Classical Musicians - Agrell
   h. Jump Right In: The Instrumental Series
   i. Do It! Band Series
   j. Other

42. Please outline the most effective exercise/activity you have used for teaching improvisation in a large group traditional band rehearsal.

43. Would you like to receive the results of this study?
   a. Yes  
   b. No
APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Dear Band Directors:
I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Mary Leglar in the School of Music at the University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled *Meeting the Standard: A Descriptive Study of Improvisation in High School Band Programs*. The purpose of this study is provide an overview of improvisation in the high school band setting.

Your participation will involve completing a survey questionnaire and should only take about 5-10 minutes to complete. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, do not click the submit button. If you decide to withdraw after submitting your answers, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

Your responses will be kept confidential. Identification/coding numbers are located on the survey, but they will only be used to contact non-respondents through follow-up emails. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format. All coding numbers and contact information will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

The findings from this project may provide information to music teacher education programs on the need for additional improvisation training for secondary instrumental directors. There are no foreseen risks or discomforts that could result from participation in the study.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at any time. You may reach me by phone at 706-542-3737 or by email at bgladney@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 629 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By completing and submitting this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.
Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Benita L. Gladney
Music Education Graduate Student