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THE CREATIVE COMMODITY: A STUDY OF IMPROVISATION IN MIDDLE AND

HIGH SCHOOL CHORAL CLASSROOMS IN FLORIDA

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of improvisation in middle and high school choral classrooms. Specifically, the researcher sought to answer the following questions: (1) To what extent are middle and high school choral directors using improvisation activities in their classrooms? (2) How do the Core Arts Standards impact the value choral music educators' assign to improvisation? (3) What challenges do choral music educators encounter when attempting to implement improvisation? (4) What do choral music educators believe would help them effectively use improvisation in their classrooms?

A researcher-designed questionnaire was sent to 105 middle and high school choral directors from 11 counties in central and northern Florida. The results of the study indicated that 87% of the respondents did not believe improvisation could help their students develop musically. Additionally, 70% of the respondents expressed a need for more examples, tools, and resources for teaching improvisation in the choral classroom. Results from this study suggest some music educators may not value improvisation as a creative music activity in the classroom. The failure to include improvisation in many choral music classrooms may be due to a lack of teaching resources specific to vocal improvisation. Additional research is necessary to determine why choral music educators might place so little value on vocal improvisation as a component of a comprehensive choral music education. Subsequent investigations should examine the actual use of improvisation in secondary choral classrooms. A creative music activity guide, aligned with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, might also be developed to help choral music educators incorporate creative activities, such as improvisation, into their curriculums.
Keywords: improvisation, creativity, standards

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Creativity may be one of the most important commodities of the twenty-first century. The unique ability to create exists in everyone and propels us in our constantly changing world. As creative people imagine, discover, and problem-solve, they invent our future. In a report by the National Center on Education and the Economy (2007), it was predicted that in the twenty-first century, "The best employers the world over will be looking for the most competent, most creative, and most innovative people on the face of the earth and will be willing to pay them top dollar for their services" (p. 7). Creativity drives us to the leading edge of development and has become increasingly important in the field of education.

Vygotsky (2004) and Bloom (1956) were among many scholars who noted the importance of creativity in education. Vygotsky (2004) reasoned that if the goal of the education system was to propel humanity toward the future, then creativity must be at the center of education. Bloom (1956), in his hierarchy of educational objectives, established creative tasks as the pinnacle of educational activities. Yet, even as creativity has developed into one of the most important twenty-first century skills, the American education system may not be reinforcing students' creative intelligence. While students' intelligence has risen, students' ability to think creativity has steadily declined since the 1990s (Kim, 2011). To ensure the success of our students in the twenty-first century, educators may need to develop solutions to conquer the creativity deficit.

One way to support students' creative intelligence may be to provide arts instruction. Unfortunately, not all creative tasks are the same or have the same effect. However, music researchers have suggested that improvisation may be able to help students increase their

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creative thinking (Kleinmintz, Goldstein, Mayseless, Abecasis, & Shamay-Tsoory, 2014; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009). The unique process of music improvisation not only requires a student to create in real time, but it also emphasizes risk-taking which is a quality found in the most creative people (Charyton, Snelbecker, Elliott, & Rahman, 2013; Simonton, 2000; Sternburg & Lubart, 1991). Since music is an inherently creative art from, it is often assumed that music instruction is built upon creative tasks. National and state policies, including the National Core Arts Standards and the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS), integrate improvisation as a required learning objective. However, researchers have previously reported that improvisation is not extensively used in elementary or secondary instrumental music classrooms (Byo, 2000; Gruehagen & Whitcomb, 2014; Niknafs, 2013; Orman 2002; Schopp 2006). Furthermore, after a review of extant literature, no study that specifically examined music educators' use of improvisation in secondary choral music classrooms was identified. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of improvisation in middle and high school music classrooms in central and northern Florida. Specifically, this study will investigate choral directors' use of improvisation and the amount of value they give to improvisation, examine how the National Core Arts Standards and NGSSS influence the use of improvisation, and report challenges music educators encounter while attempting to implement improvisation in the choral classroom.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview of Creativity

Definitions of Creativity

Researchers of creativity have difficulty defining exactly what it means for something to be creative. In an investigation of 90 articles from the top scholars and journals in creativity, only 38% of the articles actually provided a definition for creativity (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004). Kratus (1990) proposed that every creative act consists of three components: "(1) the person who is creating, (2) the process of creation, and (3) the product that is created" (Kratus, 1990, p. 34). In order to gain insight into the complex nature of creativity, the following research will be presented according to these three components.

The person. Researchers agree that a creative person is original, fluent, and flexible (Dellas & Gaier, 1970; Kratus, 1990). As a whole, these cognitive attributes help a person generate numerous unique ideas. Researchers have also examined the role of cognitive risk in relation to a person's ability to create (Charyton et al., 2013; Simonton, 2000; Sternburg & Lubart, 1991). Cognitive risk is a person's capacity to develop and share ideas despite possible opposition from others (Charyton et al., 2013). In a study of the relationship between cognitive risk and creativity, Charyton et al., (2013) examined 1,163 college students using creative personality, creative temperament, and creative risk tolerance tests. The results of the study indicated that the higher a person's scores on the creative personality and temperament tests, the greater the amount of cognitive risk they were willing to take (Charyton et al., 2013). The results of this study suggest a creative person has a greater capacity for risk-taking, which allows them to develop a variety of unique ideas despite opposition.

The process. Webster (1990) and Cropley (2010) defined creativity in terms of the processes required to develop creative products. Webster (1990) noted that creative thinking could be divided into two categories: divergent and convergent thinking. Divergent thinking consists of using imaginative thinking to develop many solutions to one problem. On the other hand, convergent thinking occurs when factual information is used to generate and select one solution (Webster, 1990). Cropley (2010) also proposed that ideas are produced through the use of both divergent and convergent thinking; however, he also highlighted the importance of prior knowledge to the development of ideas. Cropley (2010) posited that the creative process involved the rearrangement of prior knowledge, using divergent thinking, to generate something new. He also emphasized the importance of convergent thinking not only in the evaluation of ideas, but also in the preparation of ideas. With a broader hypothesis as to the roles of divergent and convergent thinking, Cropley (2010) presented an expanded creativity phase model. This creativity phase model depicted seven phases of creative thinking: information, preparation, incubation, illumination, verification, communication, and validation. The use of divergent and convergent thinking in the creative process was documented for each phase. Cropley's (2010) creativity phase model demonstrated the integrated roles of convergent and divergent thinking throughout the entire creative process.

The product. Mishra and Henriksen (2013) also posited a practical explanation for creative tasks. The researchers defined creative tasks in terms of the product. They argued that something was creative if the product was novel, effective, and whole (NEW) (Mishra & Henriksen, 2013).

The person, process, and product are intertwined during the generation of creative ideas. Divergent thinking, as outlined by Webster (1990) and Cropley (2010), and cognitive risk-taking

are manifested during the generation of *novel* ideas. The generation of *novel* ideas takes place within phase four, illumination, of Cropley's (2010) creativity phase model. Convergent thinking, which allows a person to evaluate and select solutions based on factual information, is used to develop creative products that are *effective*. This process occurs within phase five, verification, of the creativity phase model (Cropley, 2010). Finally, both divergent and convergent thinking facilitate the development of creative products that are *whole*. Although the development of creative ideas is complex, it is critical for the advancement of society.

Importance of Creativity

The importance of creativity is firmly supported by the research of leading Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. In his work, *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood*, Vygotsky (2004) described two types of human activities: reproduction and creation. In reproduction, a person repeats a previous action or behavior. When a person creates, they give rise to something new. While Vygotsky (2004) valued each process equally, he asserted that creation enabled human existence to move forward: "It is precisely human creative activity that makes the human being a creature oriented toward the future, creating the future and thus altering his own present" (p. 9).

Lee, Florida, and Gates (2010) supported Vygotsky's claims and documented the importance of creativity in the development of society. These researchers proposed that innovation was the result of "human capital, creativity, and diversity" (p. 14). Since creative thinking is linked to innovation, it is a sought-after skill in the twenty-first century workforce. According to an IBM survey of more than 1,500 chief executive officers (CEOs) from 60 countries and 33 industries, CEOs believed that creativity was the most important skill to successfully navigate the increasingly complex world (Tomasco, 2010). While Vygotsky (2004)

had previously noted the importance of creativity for the advancement of modern society, he also recognized the importance of creativity in education.

Creativity in Education

Vygotsky (2004) reasoned that creativity should be the goal of education:

To the extent that the main educational objective of teaching is guidance of school children's behavior so as to prepare them for the future, development and exercise of the imagination [creativity] should be one of the main forces enlisted for the attainment of this goal. (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 88)

Recognition of the need for creativity in American education began as a result of Russia's successful launch of Sputnik I in 1957 (Cropley, 2001; Esquivel, 1995). While attempting to determine why the United States had been defeated in the space race, it was proposed by American psychologist, J. P. Guilford, that our engineers lacked creativity. In response to Guilford and our defeat, the National Defense Act was passed (Esquivel, 1995). This educational reform, along with efforts by the National Science Foundation, began to focus the American education system on creativity (Esquivel, 1995). The importance of creativity in academic thinking was further supported by the research of American educational psychologist, Benjamin Bloom.

In an effort to classify cognitive activities, Bloom (1956) proposed a hierarchy of educational objectives. In his book, the *Taxonomy of Education Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*, Bloom (1956) outlined six cognitive levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. While the taxonomy was created to aid in the development of effective curriculum and assessment procedures, the taxonomy was not readily accepted in the field of education (Seaman, 2011).

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Critics argued that the handbook was too abstract to be used as a curriculum development tool or as a guideline for creating assessments. Opponents also observed that the taxonomy was being used outside of its original context, which skewed its effectiveness (Booker, 2007; Wineburg & Schneider, 2009). Due to misuse and the lack of practical application of the taxonomy, it was revised in 2001. In this revision, cognitive domain names changed from nouns to verbs. The new taxonomy outlined the cognitive domains in terms of actions that students complete: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). While Bloom's (1956) original taxonomy did not establish creativity as the highest level of cognitive activity, his research served as a framework for Anderson & Krathwohl (2001) to recognize the importance of creativity in education.

Since creativity has become increasingly important in education, there has been an increase in the amount of research dedicated to creativity (Shaheen, 2010). The majority of this research has focused on teaching strategies (Niu and Liu, 2009; Rinkevich, 2011). Although many researchers have simply provided lists of creative teaching strategies Horng, Hong, Chan Lin, Chang, and Chu (2005) designed a study to determine the most effective strategies for developing creative thinking in the classroom. In this study, Horng et al. (2005) examined three award-wining teachers who had received the GreaTeach Creative Instruction Award. Each teacher was interviewed and observed within his or her classroom. The results of the study indicated that these teachers used the following teaching strategies to encourage creative thinking: student-centered activities, connection between teaching contents and real life, management of skills in class, open-ended questions, encouragement of creative thinking, and use of technology and multimedia. Not only has the need for creativity in education lead to

increased research for effective teaching strategies, but it has also lead to the development of new curricula focused on creativity in conjunction with twenty-first century skills.

Developed in 2002, the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) was created to help students develop the skills needed to succeed in the twenty-first century. P21 was created as an integrated approach to teaching core academic subjects along with twenty-first century skills. The program used core academic subjects as the basis for building knowledge from which students could create. Within the program, twenty-first century skills included areas such as innovation and learning; information, media, and technology; and life and career skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2015). The Partnership for 21st Century Learning has documented the success of their programs; however, additional independent studies are needed to determine their effectiveness.

Although educators and researchers have recognized the importance of stimulating students' creativity, current efforts may not be effective. Kim (2011) analyzed whether or not the creative thinking of school-aged children was increasing. Participants included 272,599 kindergarten through 12th grade students whose creative thinking abilities were analyzed using the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking. Results of the study indicated that most aspects of students' creative ability, including fluency and originality, decreased from 1990 to 2008 (Kim, 2011). This trend of creative decline might have been catalyzed by Common Core State Standards which may inadvertently promote an emphasis on high-stakes testing and a lack of concrete methods for developing students' creativity in the classroom (Ohler, 2013).

The Common Core State Standards for language arts and mathematics were designed to help students develop the skills needed to succeed in college and in their careers. The standards were not mandatory, but by 2014, they had been adopted by 43 states (Common Core State

Standards Initiative, 2015). Although previous researchers had pinpointed creativity and

innovation as essential twenty-first century skills (Florida, 2007; Lee, Florida, & Gates, 2010;

Vygotsky, 2004), Ohler (2013) noted the Common Core State Standards did not specifically

mention the development of student creativity or innovation in core academic subjects. He

reasoned that the Common Core State Standards promoted an emphasis on high-stakes testing as

the culmination of learning and did not give educators practical means for fostering students'

creative intelligence. As a result, Ohler (2013) argued that the standards had failed "to support

the United States' reputation for creativity in the global community" and therefore may not be

preparing students for the twenty-first century workforce (Ohler, 2013, p. 46). Similarly, a lack

of focus on creative tasks in music education may be driven by high-stakes testing, an emphasis

on performance standards, and limited resources for teaching creativity (Radocy, 2001;

Rittennhouse, 1989; Orman, 2002).

Creativity in Music Education

Since music is an inherently creative art, it is often assumed that creativity is an essential

component in music instruction. However, with the increased use of results from music

competitions and music performance assessments as evaluations of the entire music program,

music educators may place a greater emphasis on performance at the expense of creative tasks

(Radocy, 2001; Rittenhouse, 1989).

In his book, *Seeking the Significance of Music Education*, Reimer (2009) asserted that

music classrooms in the United States had "historically given major emphasis to performance"

(p. 73). According to Radocy (2001), an emphasis on performance in American music

classrooms stems from competition. Additionally, many administrators view performance

competitions as appropriate assessments of a music program's success. In a study that examined

the attitudes and perceptions of 151 high school choral directors and their administrators, Rittenhouse (1989) indicated administrators viewed performance competitions as an accurate method of music program evaluation. Unfortunately, Radocy (2001) noted that "in addition to restriction in repertoire, emphasis on competition may stress high-quality performances by a talented few at the expense of more comprehensive musical experiences for the majority of students" (Radocy, 2001, p. 123). Additionally, the National Standards of Music Education solidified performance as the culmination of learning in music.

The National Standards of Music Education were created in 1994 to legitimize the field of music education, which had not previously developed curriculum standards (Benedict, 2006). In a series of interviews with the seven researchers that developed the National Standards of Music Education, Cathy Benedict (2006) noted that the researches wanted to encourage the acceptance of music education as an academic discipline by developing national standards similar to other academic disciplines (Benedict, 2006). The content of the standards were written to include non-controversial, measurable, musical activities that would not define music curricula, but serve as an outline of skills that students should be able to demonstrate as a result of an education in music (Benedict, 2006). The Music Educators National Conference (MENC) released nine standards in 1994:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.

7. Evaluating music and music performances.

8. Understanding relationships between music, the arts, and disciplines outside the arts.

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture. (National Association for Music Education, 2014)

The development of the standards helped to legitimize music education since they defined the potential for academic rigor in music classrooms. Wendell (2007) further emphasized the cognitive complexity of musical tasks when she analyzed the nine national standards in relation to the cognitive levels (i.e., remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create) outlined in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Wendell (2007) noted that an education in music involved every level in the taxonomy. However, by examining Wendell's (2007) analysis, it might be noted that few standards emphasized student creativity. For example, only the third and fourth National Standards for Music Education required students to combine different musical components to create something new. Additionally, the majority of the standards were categorized by application, and only required students to utilize lower-order thinking skills to achieve the objective. Although the National Standards for Music Education may not have emphasized creative music activities, the National Core Arts Standards focus on creativity as an essential component of music instruction and recognize its importance as a twenty-first century skill (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014).

The National Core Arts Standards were developed in 2014 to help music educators adapt to the changing educational climate. With the increased use of formal assessments, a new focus on educational technology, and an emphasis on college preparation, music educators needed new standards to help structure their teaching. Shuler, Norgaard, and Blakeslee (2014) introduced,

analyzed, and reflected on the Core Arts Standards, which consisted of three artistic processes (creating, performing, and responding) and 13 processing components. These standards provided a sequence of outcomes for music education. Similar to standards developed in other disciplines, the Core Arts Standards incorporated at least one Enduring Question and a corresponding Essential Question (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). These questions helped music educators focus their instruction and guide the learning process (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014). The National Core Arts Standards also included cornerstone assessments and benchmarks that could be used as a guide for teachers to create their own assessments. Shuler et al. (2014) concluded that the Core Arts Standards shifted the focus of music education from performance to musical independence and literacy. The founders of the standards highlighted the importance of creation as part of music literacy:

> Artistic literacy requires that they [students] engage in artistic creation processes… teachers and students must participate fully and jointly in activities where they can exercise the creative practices of imagine, investigate, construct, and reflect… these meta-cognitive activities are critical to student learning and achievement across the arts and other academic disciplines. (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014, p. 17)

Not only is the idea of creativity as an essential component of musical literacy emphasized in the Core Arts Standards, but it is also recognized for its importance as a key twenty-first century skill:

> Success and achievement in the arts demands engagement in the four fundamental creative practices of imagination, investigation, construction, and reflection in multiple contexts. These meta-cognitive activities nurture the effective work habits of curiosity, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, and

collaboration, each of which transfers to the many diverse aspects of learning and life in the 21st century. (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014, p. 19)

The National Core Arts Standards represented great strides in the field of music education. The National Standards of Music Education, first introduced in 1994, were mainly comprised of performance standards, but the National Core Arts Standards introduced in 2014 reflected the increased importance of creativity in music. Although the National Core Arts Standards emphasize creativity, teachers are not required to use these standards. The standards only serve as a guide for music educators. Conversely, many music educators are required to include all state standards in their curriculums.

In Florida, music educators must align their instruction with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS). The 2015 Florida Statute for K–20 public education states, "Next Generation Sunshine State Standards establish the core content of the curricula to be taught in the state and specify the core content knowledge and skills that K–12 public school students are expected to acquire" (Florida Statutes, 2015). Within the NGSSS for music, policy makers have provided numerous opportunities for students to express their creativity in music. For example, the enduring understanding MU.912.S.1 documents, "The arts are inherently experiential and actively engage learners in the process of creating, interpreting, and responding to art" (CPalms, 2015). Additionally, MU.912.F.1 adds, "Creating, interpreting, and responding in the arts stimulates the imagination and encourages innovation and creative risk-taking" (CPalms, 2015). Although the importance of creativity in music education has been supported by the creators of the National Core Arts Standards and the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, finding an effective means to help students develop and express musical creativity may be difficult.

Researchers agree that creativity in music can be expressed through exploration, improvisation, composition, and performance (Gordon, 1989; Kratus, 1990; Webster, 1990). Kratus (1990) suggested that musical exploration is the unplanned discovery of sounds on an instrument. He compared musical exploration to a child discovering an instrument for the first time. On the other hand, improvisation occurs when a person is able to predict musical sounds to create organized, musical patterns in real time (Kratus, 1990). Composition differs from the process of improvisation since it allows a musician to reflect, change, and evaluate their ideas (Kratus, 1990). Additionally, Kratus (1990) argued that performance is only a means of creative expression if it is a *creative* performance. He suggested that a *creative* performance occurs when the performer is actively involved in solving musical problems throughout the rehearsal and performance. Although there are many avenues for expressing creativity in music, improvisation is unique in that it requires spontaneous creativity.

Improvisation in Music Education

Defining Improvisation

Improvisation is a distinct, creative act and involves many complex processes. One process imperative to improvisation is audiation (Kratus, 1990). For example, Kratus (1990) proposed that a child who is exploring an instrument for the first time may make spontaneous sound on the instrument, but the child is not improvising (Kratus, 1990). Instead, improvisation occurs when a person is able to audiate and predict the sounds they will hear (Kratus, 1990). This predication allows a person to fit their musical creation within a specified musical framework. Gordon (1989) also emphasized the importance of audiation in improvisation: "In a word, the act of music creativity and improvisation is the act of audiating familiar tonal patters and rhythm patterns and then reorganizing them into an unfamiliar order and sequence" (p. 77).

Additionally, according to Gordon's (1989) perspective, improvisation is not only musical thought that has been spontaneously created, but it can also be created as a process or a product. Improvisation as a process occurs when a person improvises, while audiating, without the intent of performing the improvisation for an audience (Gordon, 1989). As a result, the improviser is free to explore his or her musical thoughts without the constraints of a musical framework. Conversely, improvisation as a product occurs when a musician improvises for an audience. As a result, product-focused improvisations more strictly conform to a predetermined musical framework. While Gordon (1989) asserted that the necessity of a musical framework for improvisations changed based on the type of improvisation, other researchers considered such frameworks an essential component of improvisation. In an effort to define improvisation, Azzara (2002) compiled extensive research on the definition of improvisation. Following a review of extant literature, he identified three key factors of improvisation: "(1) spontaneously expressing musical thoughts and feelings, (2) making music with certain understood guidelines, and (3) engaging in musical conversation" (Azzara, 2002, p. 172). Similar explanations for improvisation were found in a study conducted by Biasutti and Frezza (2009). The researchers created an improvisation questionnaire that was given to 76 participants who had at least two years of prior experience with improvisation. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine key components of improvisation. The results of Biasutti and Frezza (2009) identified five aspects of music improvisation: "anticipation, emotive communication, flow, feedback, and use of repertoire" (p. 241). This supported previous research that indicated improvisation relied on the ability to audiate and anticipate the musical conversation (Gordon, 1989; Kratus, 1990). Biasutti and Frezza (2009) defined improvisation as "a process characterized by the use of preexisting musical formulas and patterns which combine with other more creative fragments. In

these moments, new solutions are created and elaborated in real time" (p. 240). This characteristic ability of improvisers to create in real-time not only allows musicians to express musical thinking, but it may also help improvisers increase creativity.

Improvisation and Creativity

Researchers of creativity and improvisation have suggested that music improvisation is not only a way to express musical creativity, but it may also increase creativity. In a study analyzing the effects of improvisation on creativity, Kleinmintz et al. (2014) found that musicians trained in improvisation had significantly greater levels of creativity. The authors suggested that this difference in creativity was "potentially explained by differences in the way musicians and non-musicians evaluate their products" (p. 6). While musicians not trained in improvisation were more critical of their ideas, improvisers were able to increase creativity by inhibiting the evaluation of ideas (Kleinmintz et al., 2014). Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) conducted a similar study. To determine whether or not introducing improvisation to music students in primary grades improved creative thinking, an experimental group of students was taught from an improvisation-based music curriculum. The control group received no improvisation instruction. Both groups were tested on creative thinking, musical flexibility, musical originality, and musical syntax. Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) reported that the experimental group scored significantly higher in all areas. The authors concluded that lessons in improvisation may help students develop creative thinking and grasp musical concepts. Similar studies have focused on the effect of improvisation on students' musical achievement (Azzara, 1993; Montano, 1983; Whitman, 2001).

Improvisation and Musical Achievement

Azzara (1993) studied the effect of improvisation on musical achievement in elementary students. The researcher created an instrumental music curriculum focused on improvisation. An experimental group received instruction from Azzara's (1993) curriculum, while the control group did not. At the end of the program, both groups performed etudes for a set of judges. The performances were evaluated based on tonality, rhythm, and expression. Students who had received instruction in improvisation scored significantly higher than students in the control group. In a similar study, Montano (1983) examined the effect of rhythmic improvisation on students' ability to accurately sight-read rhythms on a keyboard. Two groups were given four excerpts to practice sight-reading. The experimental group was also given instructions for creating rhythmic improvisations with the four excerpts. After six weeks of instruction, both groups were tested on their ability to sight-read a short musical excerpt. Students in the experimental group who had practiced improvising rhythms had greater accuracy when sight-reading rhythms (Montano, 1983). Additionally Whitman (2001), studied the effects of a vocal improvisation program in music rehearsals for students in grades 9–12. In her study, the experimental choral ensemble received 15 minutes of improvisation instruction and practice during choir rehearsal. All other rehearsal activities remained the same for the experimental and control groups. A comparison of pre- and post-test data revealed that improvisation helped students increase their aural theory, music theory, and sight-reading skills. After instruction in improvisation, students in the experimental group increased their ability to identify consonance and dissonance, intervals, and melodies. Additionally, the experimental group reported an increased ability to read musical notation and increased their knowledge of intervals and scales (Whitman, 2001). Improvisation may be related to increased musical achievement, but the reason why improvisation helped the experimental groups in these studies perform better than

the control groups is still unclear. Nevertheless, it seems improvisation may have a positive effect on the creativity and musical achievement of elementary and secondary school students.

Implementing Improvisation

Instruction in improvisation may increase creativity and musical achievement. Since it is also a required learning objective in national and state music policy, this may indicate that many consider improvisation to be an important skill to teach all students. A significant portion of the research investigating how music educators integrate improvisation into their curricula has been conducted in elementary music classrooms (Beegle, 2010; Brophy, 2002, 2005; Hamilton, 1999; Koutsoupidou, 2005; Whitcomb, 2005, 2007). Most of this research examined the nature of elementary students' improvisations and how to include improvisation in the elementary classroom. However, methods for implementing improvisation in the elementary classroom are only effective if teachers are willing to use improvisation; therefore, it is important to determine the state of improvisation in elementary and secondary school classrooms.

Improvisation in elementary music classrooms. Studies of improvisation in elementary music classrooms indicate that music educators value improvisation standards, but they may lack the necessary time and resources to implement them effectively (Byo, 2000; Orman, 2002). Byo (2000) examined how effectively elementary music specialists felt they implemented the National Standards of Music Education. Although the music educators reported they had a responsibility to teach all of the standards, the survey results indicated the teachers' training, time, and access to materials directly impacted their use of each standard. For example, music educators reported they felt least prepared to teach standards three (improvising) and four (composing). Most teachers expressed they would be able to effectively implement improvisation standards if they had more time and resources (Byo, 2000).

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In a similar study, Orman (2002) examined elementary music educators' use of class time. To determine how these teachers used their class time, the researcher videotaped them in their classrooms over an 18-month period. After the observation period was complete, she analyzed the content of the videos in relation to the National Standards for Music Education. The results of this study revealed that the largest amount of time outside of teacher instruction was spent on reading and notating music (Orman, 2002). On the other hand, the researcher reported that the least amount of time was spent on activities that required creative thinking. Orman (2002) suggested that this result may be due to the fact that creative activities take more time to develop.

Gruehagen and Whitcomb (2014) focused on the extent and nature of elementary teachers' improvisation instruction. These researchers designed a study to measure the role of improvisational activities in elementary classrooms. Participants included 1,174 elementary music educators who were randomly selected to complete a researcher-designed survey. The results of the study indicated the majority of teachers viewed improvisation as a means for students to develop musically and express creativity; although, this value claim was not necessarily reflected in the music educators' use of improvisation. Gruehagen and Whitcomb (2014) reported that most teachers (58%) included improvisational activities in less than 10% of their total instructional time; however, the researchers failed to provide reasons for the teachers' limited inclusion of improvisation.

The results of previous research suggest elementary music educators value improvisation standards, but do not often include improvisation in their classrooms (Byo, 2000; Gruehagen & Whitcomb, 2014; Orman, 2002). The minimal use of improvisation in elementary music classrooms may be due to a lack of time and resources (Byo, 2000; Orman, 2002). An

examination of improvisation in general music classrooms reported similar use of improvisation, with different challenges (Niknafs, 2013).

Improvisation in elementary and middle school general music classrooms. Fewer studies report on music educators' use of improvisation in middle schools. Niknafs (2013) sent a questionnaire to K–8 music educators in the state of Illinois to determine their use of improvisation. Participants in the study reported that improvisation could be used as a means of fostering student creativity and expression. However, this result was disproportionate to their use of improvisation. Similar to Gruehagen and Whitcomb (2014), the results of Niknafs' (2013) study indicated that a majority of teachers (67%) used improvisation in less than 20% of their instruction time. The researcher found that a teacher's ability to improvise was a key indicator of their use of improvisation in their classroom. If a teacher was not comfortable improvising, they were less likely to use improvisation. The results of Niknafs (2013) indicate that a major challenge for teachers who wish to incorporate improvisation in their classrooms may not be time or resources, but the teachers' lack of experience with or expertise in improvisation. While middle school teachers may lack experience when teaching improvisation, researchers have identified additional challenges for music educators teaching improvisation at the high school level.

Improvisation in secondary classrooms. Improvisation in secondary music classrooms remains one of the least studied areas of music education. In their investigation of research trends before and after the release of the National Standards of Music Education, Kruse, Oare, and Norman (2008) supported the idea that improvisation in secondary classrooms was not being extensively studied. The researchers found that the most studied grade levels regarding music improvisation were K–4, while the least studied grade levels were 9–12 (Kruse, Oare, &

Norman, 2008). Since improvisation often becomes more exclusively linked to jazz at the secondary level, it may not be studied extensively.

In his research, Beckstead (2013) found that music improvisation was a fundamental component in elementary classrooms, but it was used sparingly in secondary general music or ensemble classes. Beckstead (2013) proposed that during high school, the value of improvisation becomes limited to jazz contexts. Conway (2008) also supported the idea that improvisation was not regularly used in 9–12 music classrooms. The researcher examined the National Standards of Music Education in relation to how each standard was addressed in the schools. The results indicated that in high schools, all music standards may not be met in each class. For example, Conway (2008) reported that standard three (improvising melodies) may be fulfilled in jazz band, but may not be included in any other class. The problem with this approach is that unless students are enrolled in every music class at a school, they may not receive a complete education in music (Conway, 2008). Since improvisation may not be emphasized outside of jazz contexts, researchers have continued to examine the value and challenges of teaching improvisation within traditional ensembles.

Improvisation in secondary instrumental programs. To determine how music educators used improvisation in high school band programs, Schopp (2006) surveyed band directors throughout the state of New York. While 44.4% of the teachers reported they taught their students to improvise, teachers indicated that improvisation was mostly taught in jazz band. This result supported Conway's (2008) and Beckstead's (2013) claim that improvisation may not be used extensively in ensembles outside of jazz. Schopp (2006) also identified reasons why improvisation may not be used in performance ensembles. He reported that most band directors prioritized preparing for concerts, performance assessments, and festivals over teaching

improvisation. As a result, most band directors reported a lack of time as the main reason they may not use improvisation in their classes. Additionally, band directors indicated that student anxiety toward improvisation was a major challenge (Schopp, 2006).

In comparison to elementary music classrooms, the results of Schopp (2006) indicated that in secondary classrooms, improvisation was not as highly valued in all contexts (Schopp, 2006). While improvisation is valued within jazz band, music educators believed the role and importance of improvisation changed when placed in a different context, such as a general ensemble. However, both elementary and secondary music teachers have agreed that time was a major challenge when trying to implement improvisation (Byo, 2000; Orman, 2002; Schopp, 2006). While the extant research includes investigations of the use of improvisation in secondary instrumental programs, a dearth of knowledge concerning the use of improvisation in middle and high school choral classrooms seems to exist.

Improvisation in secondary choral classrooms. In the course of an extensive review of the existing literature on improvisation, no study was found that specifically examined how music educators use improvisation in their classrooms. However, researchers have studied how choral music educators develop students' higher-order thinking skills in their classrooms. Garrett (2013) examined the amount of time spent using critical thinking skills during non-performance activities in choral rehearsals. Critical thinking skills were defined by the top two higher order thinking skills outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy: evaluate and create. Garrett (2013) found that 6.36% of non-performance time was spent on activities that utilized critical thinking skills. The results of this study indicated that choral music educators may not be spending enough time developing students' critical thinking skills in choral music classrooms (Garrett, 2013).

Need for Present Study

Creativity may be one of the important commodities of the twenty-first century. With a highly-developed capacity to create, a creative person asks questions, solves problems, innovates, and imagines. In order to propel society into the future, we ought to reinforce the creative intelligence of our children (Vygotsky, 2002). One way to develop students' creative abilities is through the arts. Musical improvisation is a unique form of creative expression in that it might also help students increase their ability to think creatively (Kleinmintz et al., 2014; Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves, 2009). Although improvisation is included in national and state music policy, the results of previous research have indicated it is not used regularly at the elementary or secondary level. Furthermore, there is a paucity of research regarding choral music educators' use of improvisation in secondary choral classrooms. Therefore, the goal of this study is to analyze the use of improvisation in middle and high school choral classrooms, investigate the amount of value choral music educators give to improvisation, and explore the effect that knowledge of national and state improvisation standards have on choral music educators' curricular choices. Additionally, this investigation seeks to identify and report challenges choral directors encounter while attempting to include improvisation in their lessons.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this research was based on a similar study conducted by Gruehagen and Whitcomb (2014). In their study, a researcher-designed questionnaire was sent to elementary general music teachers throughout the United States to determine how teachers used improvisation in their classrooms. While Gruehagen and Whitcomb (2014) investigated the ways in which elementary teachers used improvisation, the purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence of improvisation in middle and high school choral classrooms, as well as to examine the factors that influenced its use. The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent are middle and high school choral directors using improvisation activities in their classrooms?

2. How do the National Core Arts Standards impact choral music educators' use of improvisation?

3. How do the National Core Arts Standards impact the amount of value choral music educators give to improvisation?

4. What challenges do choral music educators encounter when attempting to implement improvisation?

5. What do choral music educators believe would help them effectively use improvisation in their classes?

Measures

The study utilized a researcher-designed questionnaire that consisted of 25 questions: four demographic, 15 selected-response, and six free-response items. Free-response items were developed to gather insightful, narrative responses, but they were not required responses from the participants. The selected-response items invited participants to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type scale: (5) strongly agree, (4) agree, (3) neutral, (2) disagree, or (1) strongly disagree. The questionnaire was anonymous and did not require participants to provide their names, their school's name, or the name of the county in which they taught.

The survey was originally designed in four sections: implementation of improvisation, challenges of teaching improvisation, improvisation and music standards, and value of improvisation. After questions for each section were created, the questions were randomized using an online random number generator (Urbaniak & Plous, 2015). The completed questionnaire was piloted to identify areas of weakness. The pilot group consisted of four professional educators who had considerable research experience. As a result of the pilot, minor changes were made to clarify the text in several of the questionnaire items. A copy of the questionnaire used in this study is included in Appendix A.

Participants

In an attempt to obtain socioeconomic and geographic diversity amongst the sample of participants, middle and high school choral directors from 11 counties in central and northern Florida were invited to participate. Each school's public website was examined to collect contact information for faculty members listed as choral directors. If the school had a choral director and their email address was available on the public website, they were included in the

study. An invitation to participate in the study was sent via email to the middle school ($n = 51$)

and high school choral directors ($n = 54$). A sample of the email sent to the teachers is included

in Appendix B. Sixteen teachers began taking the survey and 13 completed it. Although the

response rate was low at 15%, it was similar to the response rate of Gruehagen and Whitcomb's

(2014) study which had a response rate of 13%. The majority of participants in this study were

new teachers. Ten participants (63%) had no more than five years of teaching experience.

Seven participants were middle school teachers, while nine were high school teachers.

Procedures

Data were collected using a researcher-designed online questionnaire that was made

available to participants through email. Participants were sent a link to the survey through their

publicly accessible, school-sponsored email. Participants were allowed two weeks to complete

the survey, and a reminder email was sent two days before the survey closed. Since free-

response items were not required responses, and not every participant completed the survey, the

number of total participants varies for each question. Therefore, the total number of participants

for the selected item, along with the percentage of participants who responded in a similar way to

the questions (rounded to the nearest whole integer), has been included.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Use of Improvisation

To determine the extent to which improvisation is used in secondary choral classrooms, participants were given the opportunity to describe how improvisation was incorporated into their curriculums. Of the participants ($n = 14$) who responded to this item, 57% indicated they rarely used improvisation. One teacher wrote, "Never in chorus—do not know enough to be able to teach it," while another teacher simply stated, "Very seldom." Twenty-nine percent of the respondents mentioned using some type of improvisation in choir. For example, discussion of improvisation in relation to teaching jazz, blues, and pentatonic scales was prevalent throughout the participants' responses. One teacher wrote, "I teach it in my Jazz unit with 7th grade chorus and general music in which they have to create a scat to a I/IV/V7 progression in AAB form," while another teacher reported that they used improvisation, "when we are singing jazz and blues music." Some teachers, 14%, discussed their use of improvisation outside of the choral classroom. One teacher wrote, "I use improvisation to a certain degree in my general music classes. I use it to help [students] discover certain concepts like melody. I rarely use improvisation in my choir classes while another teacher stated, "I use it in guitar quite a bit…They may choose any combination of chords to produce their own music…students perform folk songs and I ask them to 'make it different' and see what they come up with."

Value Attributed to Improvisation

To examine the value music educators give to improvisation, teachers were asked about the relationship between improvisation and musicality. Of the participants who responded to this item ($n = 15$), 87% did not support the idea that improvisation could help students develop

musically in a choral setting. The remaining 13% of these teachers were neutral in regards to improvisation and the development of musicality. Participants were asked whether or not they considered improvisation an important skill to develop. Of the participants who responded to this item ($n = 13$), 77% did not consider improvisation an important skill for choral students to develop, while 7% of teachers agreed that improvisation was important. Additionally, 15% of teachers remained neutral in regards to this question. These results differed in comparison to participants' responses describing the role of improvisation in choir. When asked to describe the role of improvisation, teachers reported that improvisation "is part of being a well-rounded musician" and that it "develops creativity, sense of tonality, pitch, rhythm, confidence, and musical language" while showing students "the freedom they can have in creating." Teachers were also asked if the amount of value they gave to improvisation was dependent upon the type of class in which it was included. Most teachers commented that it would be easier to teach improvisation in an instrumental class, and therefore placed more value on instrumental improvisation. One teacher wrote, "It changes when teaching an instrumental class versus a choral class because it's easier, in my opinion, to facilitate improvisation in an instrumental class." To determine if the value music educators assigned to improvisation was contingent on the type of class and class size, participants were asked if improvisation should be included in large, performance-based classrooms. Of the participants who responded to this item ($n = 16$), 63% reported that improvisation should not be included in such classrooms, while 6% agreed that it should. Additionally, 25% of participants remained neutral in regards to this question.

Impact of National and State Music Policy on Improvisation

In this study, 31% of music educators agreed they were familiar with the National Core Arts Standards, and 40% agreed that they were familiar with improvisation as a national and

state music standard. Regarding the impact of national and state standards on the use of improvisation in teacher's classrooms, the results indicated that national standards may not strongly influence whether or not teachers use improvisation. Thirteen participants responded to a questionnaire item that dealt with improvisation and national standards. Fifteen percent of those who responded reported they planned to use improvisation because it was a national standard. Conversely, state standards may have a stronger effect on teachers' use of improvisation. Thirteen participants also responded to a questionnaire item that dealt with improvisation and state standards. Thirty-one percent of those who responded indicated they intended to use improvisation because it was a state standard.

The impact of standards on teachers' use of improvisation in their classrooms was further examined through responses to the open-ended statement, "Briefly describe how the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and the National Core Art Standards impact whether or not you use improvisation in your classes." One teacher wrote, "Improvisation is a standard that I don't use... I've never been asked to or questioned about it. Until I learn methods to teach it in chorus, it won't happen." Another teacher reported, "The problem is finding a curriculum that fits our students' needs." While most responses to this statement included a need for more resources to teach this standard, some teachers reported the importance of improvisation in regards to higher-order thinking and creativity. One teacher wrote, "It is part of their curriculum. Improvisation is also a higher order thinking skill of which we are moving our students toward—based upon Common Core and NGSSS. I will build upon these skills in the classroom." Another teacher reported, "Students need to create products within the Core standards. Improvisation is a way for students to create."

Participants were also asked whether or not improvisation should be included in national and state music policy. Of the participants who responded to this item ($n = 15$), 27% agreed improvisation should be included in national and state music policy, and 20% indicated that they would use improvisation even if it was not included in national and state standards.

Challenges to Teaching Improvisation

Participants were asked whether or not a lack of time was a major challenge when trying to use improvisation. Of the participants who responded to this item ($n = 15$), 20% of teachers reported that improvisation took too much time. The results of this study indicated that teacher and student confidence and a lack of resources may be the greatest challenges when teaching improvisation in secondary choir classrooms. Although 44% of music educators reported that they received enough training to teach improvisation, only 25% agreed they were comfortable teaching it. One teacher wrote, "I like to read the notes! It is hard for me to improvise—can do it, but not comfortable." Additionally, the majority of teachers expressed a lack of student confidence to improvise. When asked to describe challenges encountered when teaching improvisation, 50% of the written responses included shyness or confidence as a contributing factor. One teacher wrote, "The biggest challenge… is getting the students to confidently improvise" while another teacher expressed, "The students are shy and tentative to experiment."

Teachers also expressed a lack of curriculum specifically geared toward improvisation in choir. When participants were given the opportunity to describe what would help them use improvisation in their classrooms, 70% of the respondents reported that more examples, tools, and resources for the implementation of improvisation were needed. One teacher reported that, "more examples of how to implement [improvisation] in the choral classroom that fits inside of MPA preparation and concert prep" were needed. However, it is unclear exactly what materials

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teachers would actually use. When participants were asked if they would use improvisation if they had access to a sequential or methods-based improvisation program, 6% agreed it would help, while 81% of respondents reported that they would not use improvisation even if it could be integrated within their normal classroom activities.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of improvisation in middle and high school choral classrooms. Specifically, the researcher sought to answer the following questions: (1) To what extent are middle and high school choral directors using improvisation activities in their classrooms? (2) How do the Core Arts Standards impact the value choral music educators' give to improvisation? (3) What challenges do choral music educators encounter when attempting to implement improvisation? (4) What do choral music educators believe would help them effectively use improvisation in their classrooms? The results of this study give rise to several key findings.

Improvisation, secondary choral classrooms, and jazz

A majority (57%) of teachers reported that they rarely used improvisation in their classrooms. Out of the 29% of teachers who reported that they did use improvisation, its use was almost exclusively linked to jazz. This finding is similar to studies of improvisation in secondary instrumental classrooms (Beckstead, 2013; Schopp, 2006). Therefore, the results of this study support the results of previous research that indicated as one progresses in music, improvisation may become more exclusively linked to jazz (Beckstead, 2013; Schopp, 2006). However, Gruehagen and Whitcomb (2014) reported that improvisation was used in a variety of manners and musical styles in elementary classrooms. In their study of elementary improvisation, these researchers reported vocal improvisation alone was used in thirteen different ways, including vocal raps (Gruehagen & Whitcomb, 2014). By associating improvisation with one genre in secondary classrooms, it is possible music educators may inadvertently suppress the use of improvisation and limit students' ability to create.

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The Impact of National and State Standards

Although there are many ways to express creativity in music, the National Standards for Music Education of 1994, the National Core Arts Standards of 2014, and Florida's Next Generation Sunshine State Standards of 2015 included improvisation as a means of expressing musical creativity. A majority of teachers reported they were not familiar with improvisation as a national and state music standard. While National Core Arts Standards are voluntary, Florida teachers are required to teach all of the state standards (Florida Statutes, 2015). Nevertheless, improvisation standards seem to lack support from teachers. Only 31% of music educators who participated in the study indicated that they planned to use improvisation because it was a state standard. This finding brings into question the impact of state standards on what teachers actually teach. Orman (2002) and Byo (2000) found similar results when they investigated the use of standards in elementary music classrooms. Specifically, Orman (2002) found that standards that required the greatest amount of creativity, such as improvisation, received the least amount of class time. The results of the present study support Orman (2002) and the extant body of research that suggests a lack of focus on improvisation throughout elementary and secondary music classrooms. The weak impact of national and state standards on teachers' use of improvisation may be due, in part, to the amount of value choral music educators give to improvisation.

Amount of Value Choral Music Educators' Give to Improvisation

While the results of previous research have indicated a positive correlation between improvisation and musical achievement (Azzara, 1993; Montano, 1983; Whitman; 1989), 87% of music educators in the current study did not support the idea that improvisation could help their students develop musically. This finding contradicted results in elementary music classrooms.

Byo (2000), Orman (2002), and Gruehagen and Whitcomb (2014) reported that elementary music educators supported the importance of improvisation in relation to students' musical development. Perhaps improvisation in secondary choral classrooms is not linked to musical achievement, because musical achievement in secondary classrooms is often linked to results from concerts and performance assessments. Schopp (2006) echoed similar conclusions when he reported that most band directors prioritized concerts, performance assessments, and festivals over teaching improvisation.

Participants' descriptions regarding the role of improvisation in choir seemed to contradict to their descriptions of the relationship between improvisation and musical development. When asked to describe the role of improvisation in choir, several teachers wrote that improvisation "expands students' creativity and confidence" and "helps students learn to explore their voices" while allowing students to "build understanding of the genres." Nevertheless, none of the music educators in this study supported the relationship between improvisation and increased musical development. Similarly, 77% of the teachers did not agree that improvisation was an important skill to develop. The difference between these responses may be that many music educators believe improvisation is only an activity for students to explore their voices, but may not view improvisation as a way to develop musicianship. However, Kratus (1990) made a clear distinction between exploration and improvisation. He argued that exploration was the unplanned discovery of sounds on an instrument, and compared exploration to a child discovering an instrument for the first time (Kratus, 1990). Although exploration is a means for expressing musical creativity, the complex process of improvisation, not exploration, may help students develop musically and creatively (Kleinmintz et al., 2014; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Kratus, 1990).

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Improvisation is unique in that it requires audiation. When a student audiates, he is able to listen to the existing musical framework, develop numerous, varied musical ideas, and then select and create his idea in real time. This complex process takes a matter of seconds and is repeated throughout a student's musical improvisation. A student must be constantly audiating and predicting the chord and rhythm changes that might occur in order to continue improvising within the existing framework. This unique process is much more than exploring sound on an instrument; it is developing an intelligent musical conversation.

Teachers may recognize the importance of improvisation in choir, but in actual application, their students may only be exploring, not improvising. For example, many teachers in this study described improvisation as a way for students to "explore their voices" and "explore varied rhythms". While allowing students to explore their voices is beneficial, it may not help the students develop musically. Perhaps this is why many music educators did not support the correlation between improvisation and musical development. Therefore, teachers might consider encouraging their students to move beyond vocal exploration and teach them the complex process of improvisation. As many teachers reported in the survey, a lack of content specific resources for teaching improvisation might be the reason many music educators choose not to move beyond vocal exploration and into improvisation.

Challenges and Solutions to Implementing Improvisation

A majority (70%) of the participants expressed that more examples, tools, and resources for the implementation of improvisation were needed. Therefore, one goal of future research might be to create effective methods for teaching vocal improvisation in choral settings. Curricula that focus on developing students' ability to audiate may be especially useful. Fostering this foundational skill would benefit students in all areas of music from sight-reading

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to performing (Gordon, 1989). Furthermore, the ability to audiate might assist students in improvising within the musical structure and preparing their improvisations mentally before performing. By refocusing the process of improvisation to audiation, music educators may increase their perceived value of the process.

Participants in this study also mentioned that a lack of student confidence was a major challenge when trying to implement improvisation. Any improvisation curriculum ought to factor this challenge into its design. Perhaps a focus on cooperative groups or improvisation activities that lead to a composition project might adequately address this concern.

Conclusion

Creativity may be one of the most important commodities of the twenty-first century. To assist our students in developing the skills to succeed in this constantly changing world, it may be necessary to inundate their learning with creative tasks. Perhaps students ought to be given the opportunity to explore, imagine, and invent often. In music, there are many ways to express creativity, including exploration, improvisation, creative performance, and composition (Kratus, 1990). Yet, musical improvisation is unique in that it may be able to increase creative thinking (Kleinmintz et al., 2014; Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves, 2009). Therefore, this study sought to examine the use of improvisation in middle and high school choral classrooms. Although the sample size of this study was small ($n = 16$), the results provide an insightful, albeit preliminary, report of the use of improvisation in secondary choral classrooms. By analyzing the results, several key findings emerged. First, the results of this study suggest that improvisation in secondary classrooms is mainly used within jazz styles. Future research that examines this phenomenon might prove to be beneficial.   Additionally, it seems as though the national and state improvisation standards have little effect on how improvisation is used in teachers'

classrooms. The infrequent use of improvisation standards may be the result of a minimal amount of value given to improvisation by music educators. It is possible that music educators in the study considered vocal exploration and vocal improvisation to be equivalent. However, improvisation is unique in that it requires audiation (Kratus, 1990). Future research might examine if the improvisations of secondary choral students employ the use of audiation or if the students are only exploring with their voices. Furthermore, one reason many educators may not use improvisation in their classrooms is that they do not have the appropriate resources to effectively implement it. Instructional tools that emphasize the development of audiation, improvisation, and student confidence might be developed to ensure additional methods of creative expression are supported within secondary choral classrooms.

Voluntary Consent for Online Survey:
Creative Music Activities in Choral Classrooms

My name is Caitlynn Christensen. I am an undergraduate Music Education student at Southeastern University. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a choral music educator in Florida. Please read this form carefully.

The study: The purpose of this study is to investigate creative activities in choral music classrooms.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks or benefits in this study if you participate. Data collected in this study will remain anonymous and participants will not be identifiable in the final paper.

Confidentiality: The results of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. No identifiable information will be collected. All data collected will remain anonymous and participants will not be identifiable in the final paper or future publications of the research. Research data will be kept for five (5) years in a locked filing cabinet by the principal investigator, Dr. Mark A. Belfast, Jr.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate in this study, your decision will not have any negative consequences. If you begin the survey, you may stop at any time. The student researcher for this study is Caitlynn Christensen who is overseen by the principal investigator, Dr. Mark A. Belfast, Jr. You may contact Caitlynn Christensen (cmchristensen@seu.edu) or Dr. Mark A. Belfast, Jr. (mabelfast@seu.edu) if you have any questions. Please print this page now in order to retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Question 1
By clicking the "Yes" button below, you are stating that you are **18 years of age or older** and **AGREE** to participate in this study.

   ○ Yes

   ○ No

Creative Activities in Choral Music Classes

Question 2
How many years have you been a music educator?

| Select Answer ▾ |

0-5
6-10
11-15
16-20
20-25
25-30
30+

Question 3
Do you teach at an Arts School?

| Select Answer ▾ |

Yes
No

Question 4
What grade level(s) do you teach? *(Select all that apply)*

☐ Middle School

☐ High School

☐ Other

Question 5
What subject area(s) do you teach? *(Select all that apply)*

☐ Choir

☐ Band

☐ Orchestra

☐ General Music

☐ Other

Creative Activities in Choral Music Classes

*All questions are concerning the **current choral music classes** that you teach. Please provide an appropriate response.*

Question 6
Improvisation should be taught in *performance-based* large-ensemble classes *(ex: band, choir, and orchestra.)*
○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neutral
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Question 7
I would use improvisation if I had access to a sequential or methods-based improvisational program.
○ Strongly Agree
○ Agree
○ Neutral
○ Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

Question 8
Briefly describe how often you use improvisation in your classes.

Question 9
I would use improvisation activities if they could be efficiently integrated within my normal class activities.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 10
I received enough training to be able to effectively teach improvisation in my choral classes.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 11
I feel comfortable teaching improvisation in my choral classes.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 12
Briefly describe how the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and the National Core Art Standards impact whether or not you use improvisation in your classes.

Question 13
Teaching students to improvise can help them develop a deeper understanding of music.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 14
Briefly describe the challenges you encounter when trying to implement improvisation in your classes.

[text input box]

Question 15
I am familiar with the music improvisation standards included within the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 16
Improvisation should be included in national policies regarding music education (ex: Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and National Core Arts Standards).

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 17
Describe the role of improvisation in <u>choral</u> music classes.

[text input box]

Question 18
I would use improvisation in my classes even if it was not included in the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards or the National Core Arts Standards.

○   Strongly Agree

○   Agree

○   Neutral

○   Disagree

○   Strongly Disagree

Question 19
Improvisation is difficult to implement because it takes too much time.

○   Strongly Agree

○   Agree

○   Neutral

○   Disagree

○   Strongly Disagree

Question 20
How does the value of improvisation change based on the type of class (ex: choral class vs. general music class vs. instrumental class) in which it is used?

[text input box]

Question 21

I plan to use improvisation in my classes because the new National Core Art Standards include improvisation as a skill students should be able to demonstrate.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 22

I am familiar with the National Core Arts Standards.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 23

I use improvisation because it is included in the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 24

Improvisation is an important skill for all students to develop.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 25

One reason I may not use improvisation in my classes is because I need to spend rehearsal time making sure my choir is ready to perform at concerts, festivals, and contests.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 26

Briefly describe what would help you more frequently use improvisation in your classes.
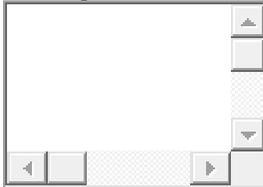
EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

(Subject line of the email: Creative Choral Activities)

Good afternoon,

My name is Caitlynn Christensen. I am an undergraduate Music Education student at Southeastern University. You are invited to participate in a study examining creative activities in choral classrooms.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will complete a brief (5 minute) survey. If you would like to participate, please click the link below to access the online consent form and survey. After reading the consent form, you may choose whether or not to participate in the study. Your participation is voluntary.

Survey Link:

If you have any questions feel free to contact me (cmchristensen@seu.edu) or Dr. Mark Belfast, Jr. (mabelfast@seu.edu).

Thank you for your assistance in this important research project. Your prompt response to the survey is very much appreciated.

Thank you,

Dr. Mark Belfast, Jr., principle investigator
mabelfast@seu.edu

Caitlynn Christensen, student investigator
cmchristensen@seu.edu

Note: If you do not wish to receive further email regarding this study, simply reply or forward to cmchristensen@seu.edu or mabelfast@seu.edu and type 'unsubscribe' in the subject line. Your name will be promptly removed.

APPENDIX C

HONORS THESIS ACCEPTANCE FORM

Honors Thesis Acceptance Form

Caitlynn M. Ensley _____ has submitted an Honors Thesis entitled:

The Creative Commodity: A Study of Improvisation in Middle and High School Choral Classrooms in Florida

Advisor, check appropriate box:

[✓] IRB application for research permission was submitted and obtained.

[ ] No human subjects were involved in the completion of this thesis. Therefore, it did <u>not</u> require IRB approval for the protection of human subjects.

It is recommended the thesis be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Southeastern University Honors Program.

Primary Advisor Mark A. Bross, Jr _____
             Print   Signature

Secondary Advisor _____
(Optional)   Print   Signature

FOR HONORS PROGRAM OFFICE USE ONLY:
[ ] Accepted

_____   _____
Honors Program Director's Signature   Date

Southeastern University Honors Program

Please put this as the last Appendix in your thesis and
return this form as part of your printed copy of your Honors Thesis/Project to:
Southeastern University Honors Program, 2nd Floor, Steelman Library

HP Thesis Acceptance Form

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