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Student Perspectives and Learning Outcomes from Self-Guided Ensemble Rehearsal

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine democratic practice in a large ensemble setting. A large ($N = 63$) auditioned concert band served as the case study for the present investigation. A series of self-guided rehearsals provided the opportunity for the ensemble members to engage in democratic musical governance without a conductor. Mixed-method methodologies were utilized to gain deep insight into interpersonal and musical events that took place during the group's rehearsals. Several findings provide new insight into how democratic practices function in large ensembles, and how these practices impact music education instruction. Specifically, I analyzed the impact of individual/group preparation and planning, perceived musical benefits to democratic musical governance, and social drawbacks from the self-guided experience. The participants also identified several salient variables for future study, including extensive preparation prior to rehearsals, the use of moderators during debates, appropriate literature selections, and allowing all members to voice their input.

Introduction

Large concert ensembles serve as a primary source of music education instruction for students in the United States. This model, in its present form, often exists with a body of students facing a podium, upon which a teacher delivers instruction. This teacher-centric model, while emulated for decades, has been questioned by scholars and practitioners who suggest a shift in focus can provide students with an empowering, more democratic learning experience (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1993; Johnson, 2010).

The construct of democracy is well established in Western cultures. The democratic elements of freedom, choice, and equality are evident in numerous aspects of life in the United

States, but can be more difficult to identify in the culture of American education. Specifically, while these topics are taught as theories in certain fields and disciplines, many have questioned the extent to which they are applied, if at all, in music classrooms across the country (Allsup, 2003, 2007; Freire, 1997; Gould, 2008; O'Toole, 2005; Woodford, 2005). These authors have suggested that promulgating an environment where students have an equal voice and opportunity in decision-making would enhance their musical experience. Others have similarly asserted that elements of trust, respect, and shared accountability (Gould, 2007; Allen, 2011) play roles in fostering a reciprocal relationship that is critical to a healthy student-teacher dynamic (Allsup, 2007).

Creating an operational definition of democracy is difficult due to the broad and complex nature of the term. I chose to utilize John Dewey's assertions that democracy is more than a form of government—it is an associated lived and communicated experience shared by all its members (1916). This position, in combination with Paulo Freire's (1997) perspective that democracy is learned through actual democratic practice, served as guides for this study. In the current study, a rehearsal series with a collegiate ensemble provided an opportunity to explore the development of democratic practice in the large group setting. Accordingly, I explored the musical experience and operations of a large, auditioned collegiate concert band ensemble. An important element unique to this group's experience was its collaboration with the New York-based *Orpheus Chamber Orchestra* (OCO), a well-known practitioner of democratic musical leadership. The collegiate ensemble explored self-governance and artistic decision-making through a self-guided rehearsal sequence, by embracing the *Orpheus* philosophical perspective and organizational procedures.

The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

Founded in 1972 by a small group of musicians who aspired to create a new kind of orchestra, OCO's goal was to liberate the creative energies of each musician and give every individual the power to direct great music (Seifter & Economy, 2001). While the group has no conductor, there is extensive leadership and ownership across the ensemble, which coincides with Seifter (2003) who states that "Power, along with responsibility, leadership, and motivation lies entirely in the hands of the people doing the work" (p. 22). They operate under eight guiding principles: 1) Place power in the hands of the people doing the work, 2) encourage individual responsibility, 3) create clarity of roles, 4) share and rotate leadership, 5) foster horizontal teamwork, 6) learn to listen learn to talk, 7) seek consensus, and 8) dedicate passionately to your mission. Further, these guidelines are operationalized in the following rules: management does not impose its vision on the musicians, disputes are settled by vote of all members, orchestra membership is decided by current orchestra members, rehearsal interaction is a critical element – with civility and trust valued as operating norms (Lubans, 1997). The ensemble regularly utilizes a "core -team" of leaders for each programmed selection. These individuals cultivate new ideas, navigate critique, and fuse ideas to advance musical progress.

Literature Review

The large concert ensemble has been a cornerstone of music education in the United States for almost a century. Regarded as part of the "big three"—band, chorus, and orchestra—concert bands have been a staple of classroom instruction and collegiate performance mediums over the years (Kratus, 2007). Some have argued that the large ensemble provides opportunities for collaboration (Luce, 2001) and is the vessel through which directors teach music (Blocher,

1997). Labuta (1997), for example, writes, “Conductors must tell their players what to do musically. Directors must explain how to do it and tell their students why it should be done” (p. 9).

While the historical significance of large ensembles cannot be understated, some have questioned their place in the context of a twenty-first century classroom. Because concert bands have been the standard of school music/instruction, they have become synonymous with school itself—so much so, educators find it hard to get past the current state of curriculum to envision new methods of music teaching (Williams, 2014). This practice has caused teachers/conductors of large ensembles to spend energy convincing others of the importance of the large ensemble enterprise. These efforts have led to an occasionally intense dialogue between those who espouse the merits of the large ensemble (e.g., Fonder, 2014) and those who question its perpetuation (e.g., Williams, 2011).

The current debates within the literature discuss not only the large ensemble group environment but also the best teachers and methods of instructional delivery for the context. The historical notion that the single most important factor in the success of a musicianship program is the band director (Labuta, 1997) has been countered by contemporary viewpoints. Some authors suggest that the director-conductor role has been autocratic—one who functions as the manager of institutional knowledge, and the sole dictator of artistic decisions (Allsup, 2003; Kratus, 2007). Further, some suggest that the conductor-student relationship, at least as it relates to instruction and curriculum, is akin to the oppressor-oppressed relationship (Benedict, 2010), where power is exerted over participants (O’Toole, 2005). Freire (1997) suggested that those in power refer to themselves as *people* and people under their control as *objects*. If the power relationship in a large ensemble is in fact “top-down,” or “podium-to-group” as it were, then

students could be prevented from co-creating their experience (Sawyer, 2006). Some suggest that if discourse in a class is silenced, musicians become complicit and powerless—participants without a voice (Allsup 2003; Gould, 2007; Gould, 2008; O’Toole, 2005). In fact, Gould (2008) writes, “democratic practice and change would be largely symbolic with no change to the power relations in the classroom” (p. 30).

If, as these scholars suggest, there is an imbalance of power in the large ensemble setting, associated with undemocratic elements, how then does change occur? Allsup (2008) proposes that a collaborative decision-making process is needed—one in which all participants grow. This position aligns with the idea that teachers can recast longstanding routines and traditions, utilizing a type of radicalization that allows for new social and musical experiences creating a climate where decisions are shared and all members have equal voice, opportunity, and representation, which can allow for a democratic, reciprocal discourse (Barrett, 2007; Freire, 1997; Kratus, 2007; O’Toole, 2005; Siefert & Economy, 2001; Woodford, 2005). This shift in the student-teacher relationship provides the students the opportunity to do more (Allsup, 2003, 2007), but requires courage, imagination, and a challenging of the status quo that may be met with some resistance (Woodford, 2005).

Embracing a process that is inclusive of all participants in the large ensemble enterprise requires that the power and control of a rehearsal be of a collaborative nature. The benefits of collaborative endeavors are far reaching and include heightened creativity (Claire, 1993; Sawyer, 2006), shared understandings (Kashub, 1997; Wiggins, 2000), higher quality social interactions (Burland, 2008), and the development of a sense of a musical community of practice (Sawyer, 2006). Further, it has been demonstrated that music groups with a supportive, nurturing conductor have a better self-image (Matthews & Kitsantas, 2007). Operating with the

understanding that a collaborative learning environment is multi-voiced and contains numerous perspectives and ideas (Dewey, 1938; Sawyer, 2006; Wiggins, 2000), teachers must be willing to differentiate between cooperative and collaborative learning (Luce, 2001). This practice would allow the teachers to be viewed not as musical dictators, but as equal partners in the creative process (Allen, 2011).

Methodology

Previous investigations of large concert band ensembles have focused on repertoire (Gilbert, 1993; Ostling, 1978; Peterson, 2001), history (Fennell, 1954; Hanson, 2005; Whitwell, 1985), and philosophical practices (Hedgecoth, 2012). Other authors have provided insight into collaborative practices into music education in higher education (Soto, Lum, & Campbell, 2009). The purpose of the current study was to view a large concert ensemble through the lens of the democratic practices of collaboration, group work, and equality using the following research questions as a basis: What were the student perspectives on the self-guided experience? What did the students learn from this endeavor? How could elements of the self-guided experience be modified to create an educationally rich and socially rewarding environment for the student participants?

The participants for this investigation were the members of an auditioned concert band ($N = 63$) at a large Midwestern university. This ensemble was selected to perform at the annual state music educator clinic/conference, and a featured part of their program was a performance of composer John Mackey's *Sheltering Sky*. This performance, however, was unique in that the composition was to be rehearsed and performed without a conductor, which made for an ideal setting for the investigation's case study. Following IRB approval, potential participants were

verbally informed of the scope and purpose of the study, and were asked to sign a form confirming their understanding and willingness to participate in the various facets of the endeavor, which included: completion of an anonymous online survey, randomly selected face-to-face interviews, and rehearsal recordings of student interactions during portions of self-guided rehearsals.

Following the OCO model of building consensus, teamwork, individual responsibility, and shared leadership, the conductor identified a "core" group of students who were interested in completing and sharing analysis materials for Mackey's *Sheltering Sky* with the remaining ensemble members (from hereon referred to as the "Analysis Core"). Students were allowed to self-select into this core. The conductor met with this group of students ($n = 13$) to describe the nature of their work in detail, attend to questions, and to provide a deadline for sharing their work with other members. The brainstorming meetings of the Analysis Core resulted in an ambitious task list: collect and synthesize information about the work already available through a web search, contact the composer electronically regarding any insights he had about preparing this particular composition, create a formal/structural analysis of the composition, collect model recordings of the composition, and create a piano/harmonic reduction of the composition. The Analysis Core students met outside of rehearsal time to complete these tasks.

Initially, the conductor had planned to have a second group, a performance core of the principal players for each part, rehearse multiple times on their own prior to the entire ensemble engaging in the rehearsal cycle. However, after observing the scores and the core rehearsal procedure, an evolving sense of the process ultimately led the conductor to schedule the remaining rehearsals with the full ensemble. Doing so seemed to provide multiple insights and perspectives about the group's immediate and long-term challenges during the process.

Thus, once the individual parts to *Sheltering Sky* had been distributed to the entire ensemble, time from every rehearsal period was dedicated to preparation of the piece.

A formal relationship was also established with the OCO during the rehearsal cycle. The ensemble recorded segments of their initial rehearsals and sent them to the Artistic Director of OCO for feedback. This was followed by an interactive discussion (via Skype) between the ensemble members and the Artistic Director about the music and how the students approached implementing musical change during rehearsal.

Data collection for the current investigation consisted of three components:

Component 1

During the rehearsal cycle, the conductor dedicated portions of the rehearsal time (15 – 30 min.) for the ensemble members to rehearse *Sheltering Sky*, without a conductor. Self-guided portions of the rehearsal were digitally recorded and placed online in the ensemble's private Dropbox account. These recordings served as a reference so ensemble members could listen to their work and make plans for future rehearsals. Student commentary from the self-guided rehearsals was transcribed and analyzed, in order to identify trends in the dialogue of the musicians. For analysis purposes, comments were placed into three categories based on content analysis. The frequency of comments from different individuals, a breakdown of rehearsal discourse, and participation by gender were also analyzed.

Component 2

In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of ensemble members' perspectives, five students were randomly selected to participate in audio-recorded face-to-face interviews. Questions centered on the students' attitudes and perspectives early in the self-guided process and how these dispositions evolved during the course of the cycle. Participants were asked about

their most memorable positive/negative experiences and recommendations for other groups who engage in self-guided rehearsals. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes, and the data were made available to participants as a means of a member check.

Component 3

Following the concert performance, a ten-question online survey was distributed to the ensemble via *SurveyMonkey* (2014). The survey contained questions soliciting students' perceptions of their personal, musical, and social growth from the self-guided experience, and their beliefs regarding the benefits and drawbacks of leading their ensemble. The final survey question allowed students to provide the researcher with additional narrative comments. By analyzing student rehearsal transcriptions, face-to-face interviews, and survey data collectively, I was able to triangulate the different data sources, thus increasing the trustworthiness of the collected data.

Results

Rehearsal Commentary

Ensemble member dialogue from three of the self-guided rehearsals, one each at the beginning, middle, and end of the concert cycle, was recorded and transcribed for analysis. After several reviews of the dialogue from the three rehearsal frames, comments were filtered into three thematic categories: questioning, observation, and planning/action. This summative content analysis design is consistent with the methodological frameworks suggested by Patton (2002). The most evident theme from the student rehearsal dialogue was individuals presenting questions to the group. For example, each instance of statements such as, "Where are we starting?," "Can

we run that again?,” and “Are you giving the cue?” was placed in the questioning category. Observation statements were categorized by statements that contained no action element, but rather opinions about what was taking place in the context of rehearsal. Statements such as: “That was out of tune,” “clarinets have the lead,” and “there is a suspension in measure six” were placed in the observation category. The third statement category, action and planning, contained language that provided guidance for the remainder of the rehearsal. Examples include: “We are starting at measure seven,” “Let’s play through a bigger section,” and “We are running sections A to D, this time with a metronome.”

The first rehearsal frame of *Sheltering Sky* was 20 minutes long and consisted of 6 min. 56 sec. of music playing and 13 min. 04 sec. of student dialogue. The students’ verbal interactions contained 98 comments: 37 questioning statements, 28 observation statements, and 33 action/planning statements. For clarity, a comment was defined as a full statement spoken by a single student. Thus, brief verbal comments such as “no,” “huh,” and “ok,” were not part of the frequency count. The 98 comments were made by 15 different people: six females who contributed 44 different statements, and nine males who made the remaining 54 statements. It is important to note that many of the comments in this frame were provided by students from the Analysis core. During the 20-minute rehearsal frame, there were 11 occurrences of student crosstalk (members talking over one another), meaning there was not a clear direction to the conversation, and no single student leading the dialogue. Data from all three rehearsal frames are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Data from Rehearsal Commentary

Rehearsal frame	Total comments	Number of speakers	Male/ Female	Comment type ²			Crosstalk	Playing time/ Rehearsal length
				Q	O	A		
I	98	15	9/6	37	28	22	11	7"/13" (54%) ³
II	48	12	6/6	7	33	8	6	9"/20" (45%)
III	33	10	6/4	5	13	15	4	6"/ 7" (86%)
Totals:	179	37 ¹	21/14	49	74	45	21	22"/40"(55%)

Note. 1) The number of speakers in each rehearsal was summed to arrive at the number of total commentators. There were only 19 different members who spoke across all three rehearsals. 2) Comments were placed into Questioning (Q), Observation (O), or Action (A) categories. 3) Percentages represent the total amount of playing time vs. verbal dialogue during a rehearsal frame.

The second rehearsal frame was 29 min long and consisted of nine min 30 sec of playing and 19 min 30 sec of student dialogue. The second rehearsal frame yielded 48 comments by 12 students: six males who made 19 comments and six females who added the remaining 29 comments. Of the 12 students who spoke in the second rehearsal frame, 8 also made commentary in the first rehearsal frame. There were six instances of student crosstalk in the second rehearsal frame. Verbal commentary was again analyzed and placed into three categories. Of the 48 statements, seven were questioning, 33 were observations, and the remaining eight were action/planning. The final rehearsal frame was 13 min. long and consisted of 6 min. 10 sec. of music playing and 6 min. 50 sec. of verbal comments by students. Four females and six males made a total of 35 comments during this frame. Nine of the 10 spoke in at least one of the prior rehearsals. There were only four occurrences of students speaking over each other during the final rehearsal. Commentary from the third rehearsal frame consisted of five questioning statements, 13 observations, and 15 action/ planning statements. The data generated from the

three rehearsal frames are found in Table 1, which includes a comparison of playing time versus discourse time for each rehearsal frame.

Face-to-Face Interviews

Following the performances, five members of the ensemble were randomly selected to participate in brief face-to-face interviews. Of the original five recruited, two declined, so two additional students were selected at random. There was great consistency in the content of the answers provided by the participants. When asked about their initial reaction when informed of the self-guided endeavor, participants expressed excitement regarding the *idea*, yet trepidation in the *process*. Answers included: “I was excited,” “I liked the challenge,” and “This is innovative and [is] moving music education forward.” However, their initial impressions of the process were markedly reserved. Sample responses: “Is he crazy?,” “This is risky,” and “I was afraid that there would be no authority figure.”

Moving beyond first impressions and into the process of the conductor-less rehearsal, all the interviewees expressed great frustration when asked about the reality of the rehearsal environment. The five interviewees shared similar descriptions: “It was anxious, frustrating, a power struggle,” “It was a free for all,” “We were very tense, very awkward,” and “Ineffective, no one knew how to organize a rehearsal.” Students also expressed similar sentiments when asked if all member opinions were shared/equal. Responses included: “Some members spoke way more than they should have,” “Some really good insights were not shared,” and “It was interesting to see who stepped up to voice their opinion; some were more vocal than others.”

Each interviewee was also asked to share this or her greatest positive and negative take-away from the self-guided rehearsal series. As with previous responses, answers revealed a high

degree of consistency. Positive take-away comments included: “really learning the music,” “internalizing the piece,” and “a unified idea of performance, and putting theory skills in action.” Negative impressions included: “lack of focus, uncertainty as to who was—in fact—in charge,” “lots of tension in the room,” and “some members not being invested in the success of the cause.”

When asked about what suggestions they would provide to other groups who were embarking on a self-guided experience, all the interviewed students stated that a very strong knowledge of the score was essential. Additionally, some felt that setting realistic goals before every rehearsal was crucial. One student stated that assessing the ability level of one’s group is a key element to consider prior to committing to such a new musical/teaching experience.

Survey Data

Following the non-conducted performances of *Sheltering Sky*, one on campus and one at the state music convention, the students in the ensemble were asked to complete a brief ten-question online survey about their self-guided experience. The survey was constructed using the online software *SurveyMonkey* (2014), and was vetted by three faculty members to ensure the clarity of the questions. Students were reminded via email that the survey was anonymous and that completion of the survey implied consent to participate. The survey was sent to their school email accounts with a follow-up email sent two weeks after the initial notice.

Of the total population in the group, $N = 63$, 43 completed the survey. Thus, a response rate of 75% was achieved. The survey instrument consisted of a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), to strongly agree (5). Five questions on the survey instrument centered on respondents’ musical experience during the self-guided rehearsals. A majority of the

respondents to question one, 77%, either agreed or strongly agreed that the self-guided experience allowed them to grow as musicians. Conversely, 23% had no opinion or felt that they did not grow musically from the guided experience. Questions, means, and standard deviations for the survey questions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Responses to Survey Questions

Question	M	SD
The ensemble grew musically from this experience	4.04	.78
This experience allowed me to grow as a musician	3.87	1.00
Other collegiate ensembles would benefit from this type of experience	3.83	.96
This experience heightened my awareness of the musical elements in the selected piece.	3.74	1.20
Our ensemble would benefit from continued participation in this type of experience	3.57	1.52
I felt free to express my opinion during rehearsal	2.74	1.07
The ensemble grew socially from this experience	2.72	1.28
All member contributions/ opinions were respected	2.00	.78
Rehearsal time was used efficiently	1.87	.50

Regarding the musical elements in the rehearsed piece, a majority (68%) of respondents felt that self-guided rehearsals heightened their awareness of the piece. A much smaller percentage, 14%, felt that the experience did not increase their awareness of the musical elements in the piece. Ensemble member perspectives were also positive regarding the ensemble’s musical growth. When asked if the ensemble grew musically from the self-guided

experience, 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with 18% responding neutrally. Only two respondents felt that the ensemble did not grow musically from the self-guided experience.

Respondents were less positive when asked if the group would benefit from continued participation in self-guided experiences. The largest portion of respondents, 36%, was neutral. Only 28% strongly agreed, followed by 23% that agreed. The remaining 13% either disagreed or strongly disagreed at 4% and 9%, respectively. Similar responses were gathered when respondents were asked if other collegiate groups would benefit from a self-guided experience. More than 25% of respondents were neutral, 26%, with 38% agreeing and 28% strongly agreeing. Only one respondent strongly disagreed, 2%, and three disagreed, 6%.

Interestingly, the collected response patterns shifted dramatically when students were asked about freedom of personal expression. Only 4% strongly agreed that they felt free to express their opinion in rehearsal. The largest portion of respondents, 32% agreed that they felt free, while 20% were neutral on the topic. Almost half of all respondents, 44%, either disagreed, or strongly disagreed that they felt free to express their opinions during rehearsal.

When asked if all members' contributions were respected, the students' responses were even more polarizing. Over 75% of respondents either disagreed (49%) or strongly disagreed (30%). The remaining respondents were neutral (13%) or agreed (9%), and none strongly agreed.

Regarding the social element of the self-guided experience, responses were mixed. Almost half of the respondents disagreed (34%) or strongly disagreed (15%) that the ensemble grew socially during the experiment. A total of 34% of respondents agreed, (32%) or strongly agreed (2%), while eight respondents (17%) were neutral. The students who responded to the survey also felt that they did not use rehearsal time efficiently. Only one respondent felt that the

group used their time efficiently. Of the remaining respondents, 30% strongly disagreed and 55% disagreed. The final 13% were neutral on the topic.

Ensemble members that responded to the survey were also invited to make additional narrative comments about the self-guided experience. The main topic of each commentary was placed into a positive outcome or negative outcome category. The positive category yielded comments related to the musical aspect of the endeavor such as: “This experience expanded our horizons,” “It was a great opportunity to grow,” and “This made us listen more.” While the positive themes comprised 4 comments, negative attitudes about the endeavor generated 88 lines of narrative remarks from respondents. The negative social dynamic and stress during rehearsals were the most common elements that emerged from the content analysis. The extensive comments included: “This was unnecessary, a painful experience,” “Very stressful, a lot of egos,” “I do not believe the musical benefits outweigh the negative social impact,” and “Some personalities are too strong for the group.”

Discussion

The analysis from the three rehearsal frames revealed that males and females, overall, shared the dialogue during rehearsal, although four more males than females voiced commentary. When analyzing the dialogue of the group as a whole, a select few members of the ensemble controlled the conversation across all recorded rehearsals. Only 19 students (30%) of the 63-member ensemble made comments during rehearsals. Of these 19, five members made 128 comments, or 78% of the total commentary across all rehearsals. It is not surprising then, that students characterized certain colleagues as “dominating” or “controlling” in their survey responses.

It is possible that personality types and part placement (e.g., what student is playing principal trumpet, etc.) played a role in how dialogue unfolded across the group. Even though the self-guided rehearsal/performance experience was designed to allow students the opportunity to lead themselves in a collaborative, democratic fashion, the group dynamic that developed over time was problematic to many of the ensemble members. It is also possible that because this was the first self-guided experience for many of the ensemble members, they were simply unsure how to interact with one another without a conductor present. After what may be a year of large-ensemble directing experience, students may need to be taught how to contribute in independent ways. This factor connects with Seifert and Economy's (2001) assertion that less is expected from the members in a large conducted group—thus, once a platform is in place to provide musical input, students are initially unable to operate in such a fashion, despite guidance from the conductor. This position is also consistent with Wood's (2005) findings that democratic leadership requires courage, imagination, and challenges to the status quo within an organization.

The type of dialogue and time spent making music changed across the three rehearsal frames. While student commentary during rehearsal was reduced by two-thirds as the performance drew near, time spent playing larger portions of the piece increased dramatically (see Table 1). It is also interesting to note that while the majority of comments from the first rehearsal were questions, the majority from the second rehearsal were observations, but action comments were most frequent in the third rehearsal frame. This trend suggests that as the concert date approached, less discussion took place between ensemble members, so action statements became the focus of precious rehearsal time. Although not an explicit goal of this research, the tone of voice among the ensemble members is noteworthy. In the context of rehearsal, the five dominant speakers often offered condescending responses to other members' opinions. While

this tone may not be evident in a written transcription, listening to the comments and voice inflections offered additional insight into why so few students offered their musical ideas and rehearsal suggestions. For example, one particular student spoke to the ensemble on several occasions, and framed her musical comments in a passive aggressive manner, “I think whomever plays the melody at measure 17 needs to be more legato. If no one has a problem with that, let’s do again.” Often, when one of the five dominant voices would offer a suggestion, their comments were met with silence. After several seconds without response, the commenter would suggest that their idea be implemented.

As mentioned above, all five face-to-face interview participants shared similar perspectives on the self-guided experience. Their comments give credibility to the notion that students were excited about the possibilities that were contained in a new experience. While the “what” element was a source of anticipation, the “how” component brought concern regarding the manner in which the elements of such a democratic rehearsal would unfold. The social outcomes of the experience also seemed to outweigh the musical benefits, a conclusion supported by the data generated from the online survey. A vast majority (76%) of ensemble members felt that they grew musically, both individually and collectively. While the positive musical benefits were well evidenced, sentiments were mixed when students were asked if they would want to repeat the experience, or if they felt other types of performing groups would benefit from self-guided rehearsals.

Overall, the social element of the self-guided rehearsal was markedly negative. Students did not feel that all voices were respected, and frustrations grew as a result of dominant personalities commandeering the rehearsals. Additionally, some felt that certain ideas of ensemble members never came to light due to the interpersonal dynamic set in place by the very

vocal minority. The totality of the social dynamic calls into question the possibility that the self-guided rehearsal experience fell short of actual democratic practice and evolved in an exercise in passive cooperation and compliance. It is important to consider the nature of this study.

Generalizations are cautioned, as this was a single case study of an ensemble in a controlled environment, preparing for an imminent performance. Documentation of this case does however, provide unique data on how democratic practice can evolve—albeit imperfectly—in a traditionally undemocratic setting.

Conclusions and Implications

If democratic ideals are a goal of education, then music educators should carefully assess how they incorporate democratic elements into their classrooms and cast aside long held traditions of instruction (Gould, 2008; O’Toole, 2005; Woodford, 2005). The results of the current study suggest that music students value collaboration and appreciate multiple perspectives, information which adds to the extant literature on the topic (Luce, 2001; Sawyer, 2006; Wiggins, 2000). In order for new types of open/democratic instruction to be successful, however, individuals charged with leading ensembles should encourage all students to have a voice in all facets of the classroom, thus allowing the creative process to be in the hands of the individuals doing the work (Seifter & Economy, 2001). Interaction and shared dialogue, both themes from the present study, support Sawyer’s (2006) view that these elements must be present for participants to feel as though democratic elements of: freedom, flexibility, and equality exist in practice. Further studies into classroom climate may be needed.

Music educators who choose to expand their instructional landscape through self-guided experiences are encouraged to provide students with clear expectations and parameters of

communication, equity, and guidance, so that such a new type of collaborative rehearsal environment can succeed. Critical elements, as identified in the current investigation include: equal opportunity to speak, negotiating differences, and an understanding of shared responsibility, all of which are supported by previous authors (Allsup 2003; Kratus, 2007). Related to this is the issue that students will bring more than their physical selves to rehearsal. Siefert (2001) states: “In a large conducted group, less is expected from each member” (p. 43). While this may be true in a historical context, a self-guided experience provides a potential pathway for large ensemble members and their conductors to embrace a contemporary, humane method of engagement and instruction as suggested by Woodford (2005).

Student empowerment is another important topic that relates to the current investigation. By creating a platform for students to voice their perspectives, they direct their learning process. The collective enterprise, or “group-work” as it is commonly referred to, is not perfect. Large group decision making processes can slow productivity (Heath & Gonzalez, 1995), and cause members to have greater confidence in their decisions—even though such decision-making may have no positive impact on the final outcomes (Diehl & Strobe, 1991).

It is evident that this study’s ensemble members engaged in democratic practice during the rehearsal cycle. But how autonomous and equal was the exercise? While the conductor did not lead the group through the piece on a daily basis, she *did* set the parameters of the experience in addition to the amount of time for each rehearsal. Further, the conductor recorded each rehearsal experience for the students and uploaded the recordings to the Internet. She was also instrumental in developing the dialogue with the Artistic Director of the OCO. In brief, the self-guided design originated in the OCO and the conductor adapted the format to fit *her* ensemble. While this exercise was an attempt at a democratic practice, it was not perfect. Just as democracy

is an ideal in which the perfect implementation will never be attained, the self-guided experience made evident imbalances in representation and inefficiencies in operation. Regardless, the group's collective voice—expressed in word and musical execution—was developed, crafted, questioned, and revised as the ensemble worked toward the culminating event of the performance.

The purpose of this investigation was to survey student perceptions, learning outcomes, and potential modifications that might be necessary as part of a self-guided rehearsal experience. The triangulation of the three data sources provides important support for the assertion that student participants found great value in the musical learning environment, but social obstacles overshadowed the learning experience. The current study thus provides insight into a curricular strategy that could benefit students in a twenty-first century learning environment. This aligns with Allsup's (2012) assertion that contemporary band programs have an obligation to do more—to foster support of students' self-discovery and their development into their best selves. Additionally, students had increased ownership and musical direction of the ensemble, which permitted them to critically reflect and have ownership of and give direction to the learning process, as cited by Regelski (2005) and Dewey (1938). These types of exercises can allow for ownership of the creative process. Thus, the potential exists for a community-in-the-making to emerge.

There are several avenues of additional inquiry that are possible from this initial study. Self-guided experiences with younger groups (e.g. elementary school children), or with choral and string groups, are worthy of investigation. Additionally, since this was an initial study on the current topic, longitudinal inquiries with same-group populations are in order to see if the negative social factors diminish over time and if the positive musical perceptions persist. It

would benefit educators who choose to implement a type of self-guided rehearsal to survey the attitudes and perspectives of ensemble members during the process. Allowing the group to provide assessments of its own democratic process could inform the structure of future rehearsals and, potentially, the dispositions of ensemble members at the outcome of the experience. If democracy is in fact more than a form of government, but rather an associated and communicated experience shared by all members (Dewey, 1916), self-guided rehearsals offer today's student musicians an opportunity to experience democratic practice. As music educators, specifically those teaching large ensembles, envision new pathways of teaching and learning, this area of inquiry and practice is rich with possibilities.

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