THE USE OF COMPREHENSIVE MUSICIANSHP INSTRUCTION BY A MIDDLE SCHOOL BAND DIRECTOR: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to conduct a case study of a band director who uses comprehensive musicianship instruction in middle school bands. To determine the subject of this study, I selected ten directors based upon their reputation of success and my knowledge of middle school band directors in District 1 of the Ohio Music Education Association. I then e-mailed them a request to complete a survey that ascertained their understanding and use of comprehensive musicianship. Mr. Richard Brimmer, Director of Bands at Lake Local Schools, was chosen as the subject of this case study because his survey answers demonstrated clear knowledge and implementation of comprehensive musicianship.

I visited Brimmer’s school for a total of 16 full school days in March, April, and May of 2012, and collected data in the following ways: (a) entrance and exit interviews consisting of semi-structured questions conducted during my first and last full weeks of observation; (b) observations of the four middle school bands that I documented in a journal notebook; (c) observation notes that served as prompts for end-of-week reflective discussions with Brimmer to gain his reactions to class events; (d) a survey distributed to assenting band students during my final visit to determine their reactions to Brimmer’s instructional methods; and (e) artifacts, including method books used, quizzes and tests, major projects, performance assessment rubrics and any additional resources used in class.

Analysis of the data collected revealed the following four instructional themes in Brimmer’s teaching: (a) music theory, (b) performance skills, (c) musical independence, and (d) music’s relationship to other aspects of life. Although the research literature has shown that the primary reason teachers do not use comprehensive musicianship is performance demands, Brimmer’s use of it keeps performance at the center of his instruction. While he does not follow
one specific comprehensive musicianship model, he uses comprehensive methods to achieve his performance goals because he believes it is essential to developing musical understanding in his students. His teaching, interview responses, and discussion comments demonstrated his belief that using comprehensive musicianship in the middle school band provides students with the conceptual understanding that is required to effectively perform advanced literature in the high school band and to be knowledgeable consumers of music.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Richard Brimmer for his mentorship over the past five years and for his willingness to serve as the subject of this case study. His wisdom, cooperation, and humility made him an excellent role model. My hope is that by reading this thesis, current and future music educators alike will see the value of comprehensive musicianship through the work of a music teacher who is dedicated to truly educating his students.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive musicianship is a method of teaching performing ensembles that involves the in-depth instruction of musical concepts in addition to traditional performance techniques. Since its inception in the mid-twentieth century, many music educators have discussed the potential benefits of using comprehensive teaching strategies in school ensembles (e.g., Cargill, 1987; Garafalo, 1983; Labuta, 1997; Sindberg, 2012). In the 1960s, the Contemporary Music Project for Creativity in Music Education was initiated by The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and funded by the Ford Foundation with a grant of $1.38 million. According to Mark (2008), this project exposed a need for more contemporary music and theory instruction in school music programs and resulted in the comprehensive musicianship movement (p. 147).

The term comprehensive musicianship came from the 1965 Seminar on Comprehensive Musicianship held at Northwestern University, a seminar that Sindberg (2009) said was designed to establish a set of principles to improve undergraduate music curricula, specifically, to emphasize the teaching of theory and history to pre-service music teachers (p. 27). Mark (2008) revealed that, while the first comprehensive musicianship efforts were intended to improve music teacher education, the idea of comprehensive musicianship proved most effective in public school music settings (p. 147).

In 1977 a group of eight music educators met at Lawrence University in Wisconsin to discuss ways to add both breadth and depth to their performing ensembles’ musical experience. The educators at the conference outlined the following principles and goals concerning comprehensive musicianship (Sindberg 2009, p. 25):
• musical independence as a musician is an important result for students in performance classes;
• careful instructional planning leads to comprehensive and meaningful student learning;
• rehearsals that utilize various educational strategies and environments that facilitate in-depth student learning;
• the quality of repertoire affects the breadth and lasting impact on student learning;
• assessment of student learning is essential at all levels;
• comprehensive teaching encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and frequently produces results that exceed expectations.

The results of the conference and these principles and goals were published as Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) (Wisconsin Music Educators Association, 1977). The CMP instructional model emphasizes in-depth teaching of musical concepts through the medium of performance ensembles.

Battisti (1989) believed that some band directors forget their role as music teachers and become consumed with dense performance schedules, teaching technique, and giving entertaining performances. He expressed that band directors must remember that they are music teachers first, responsible for creating musical appreciation and expressivity in their students (p. 23). He reminded instrumental teachers of their role in the music curriculum, the standards given to them by the National Association for Music Education (1994), and their duty to provide their students with a broad musical experience. Teachers who use comprehensive musicianship provide their students with the musical opportunities they need (Battisti, 1989).
Statement of the Problem

Traditional performance instruction focuses on teaching students to accurately execute musical tasks and build technical prowess. Comprehensive musicianship has shown to improve student attitude, increase knowledge in music history, and enhance performance in aural skills, improvisation, and music theory. Advanced high school bands are able to learn and perform difficult repertoire because of their deep understanding of music theory, phrasing, form, and expression, which are concepts that go beyond technical ability and are learned from comprehensive instruction. Although much research regarding the implementation of comprehensive musicianship has been conducted at the high school level (e.g., Carlson, 1993; Whitener, 1983) and choirs (Johnson, 1992), little research exists at the middle school level.

Need for the Study

The National Standards for Music Education (National Association for Music Education, 1994) mandate that music teachers provide students with a broad musical experience at all grade levels. Students are to be instructed in composition, musical analysis, improvisation, and listening in addition to performance. Austin (1998) believed that “while there are obvious differences in labeling or categorizing outcomes… fundamentally, the National Standards for Music Education may be viewed as a ‘repackaging’ of comprehensive musicianship principles” (p. 25). Comprehensive musicianship instruction provides students with experience in these concepts and prepares them to perform difficult literature. Studying the use of comprehensive musicianship in middle school bands will reveal practical ways it can be implemented, methods that directors can use to prepare their students to enter advanced high school bands, and show how to improve middle school students’ perception of musical ideas in addition to traditional performance methods.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a case study of a band director who uses comprehensive musicianship instruction in middle school bands.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter two is divided into the following four sections; (a) history and development of comprehensive musicianship, (b) methods of teaching using comprehensive musicianship, (c) research in comprehensive musicianship, and (d) prominent texts pertaining to the teaching of instrumental music.

History and Development of Comprehensive Musicianship

To understand the need for comprehensive musicianship, one must first be aware of the origin and purpose of American school bands. Colwell and Goolsby (2002) stated that the American need for competition and victory gave birth to the band contest and served as the driving force for rapid growth in the number of American school bands (p. 8). School band contests were held in Kansas as early as 1912 and the first school sponsored national contest was held in Ohio in 1926. Cities and towns across the United States quickly created school bands for the chance to compete against their neighbors for bragging rights over whose students were the most talented (p. 8).

The band contest movement made instrumental music programs a staple of education in American schools. Mark (2008) said that school band and music curricula changed during the late 1950s when the launch of the soviet satellite Sputnik in 1957 sent ripples through the American education system (p. 149). Education had changed little between 1930 and 1950, and the need for major reform with emphasis on the sciences and technology education became paramount. Music educators saw that they would have to reform their teaching methods and philosophies for music education if they were to keep music as a part of the school curriculum (p. 149).
The Young Composers Project of the early 1960s was initiated to encourage the work of young composers and to give first-hand experiences with contemporary music to school bands and other ensembles. According to Thomson (1990), the Young Composers Project revealed a “disarming, yet widely confirmed weakness” in school music programs; school music teachers were unprepared to teach musical concepts beyond the basics of tonal harmony and major and minor keys, and were largely lacking in creativity and musical enthusiasm (p. 21). Choksy, Abramson, Gillespie, Woods, and York (2001) stated that the Contemporary Music Project for Creativity in Music Education was founded by The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and funded by the Ford Foundation, with a grant of $1.38 million, to reform collegiate music education programs and ensure that future music teachers were fluent in both classical and contemporary music theories (p. 116). In addition, the project worked to educate musicians so they had philosophies for music education that inspired lifelong learning and a passion for music as an art form.

Before the 1960s, the idea of “why” was lacking from school music programs, as many ensembles focused only on performing music rather than on understanding it (Choksy et al., 2001, p. 115). As such, studying “why” was at the center of the Contemporary Music Project. Thomson (1990) said that music classes taught in universities as part of the project sought to reform methods of teaching musical performance. Rather than simply giving musical directives to students such as “more pedal there,” the project encouraged dialogue between teachers and students so they would understand why there should be “more pedal there,” and would be able to make similar musical decisions on their own (p. 23). Thomson (1990) stated that teachers of the project “believed that the repertory of teaching should in principle omit nothing that could contribute to sharpened understandings and broadened perspectives” (p. 23).
Mark (2008) said the project’s push for more contemporary music and music theories to be taught in music schools fathered the Comprehensive Musicianship movement and that the principles of the Contemporary Music Project translated from university classes to public school music teachers (p. 147). Music teachers decided to use the music for the next concert as their curriculum rather than teaching students about musical concepts outside of context and applying it to the scores (p. 162). This use of the repertoire as the curriculum for teaching the “why” behind musical concepts became known as Comprehensive Musicianship.

Methods of Teaching Using Comprehensive Musicianship

Since the creation of comprehensive musicianship in the 1970s, several texts have been written to help ensemble teachers incorporate comprehensive musicianship into their rehearsals. Labuta’s (1997) *Teaching Musicianship in the High School Band* is a cornerstone textbook concerning comprehensive instruction in bands. Originally written in 1972, the text contains a three-to-four year curriculum in which students learn musical elements, study timbre, interpret music, and analyze musical forms. Labuta (1997) stated that using a spiral curriculum in which previously taught ideas are continuously reinforced will prevent school administrators from accusing the band program of teaching the same content every year, because the students are growing both technically and musically (p. 23). He believed that the purpose of developing comprehensive musicianship in students is to create “literate, competent, and independent musicians; not just people who have played in band” (p. 25).

*Blueprint for Band,* by Garofalo (1983) is another important resource for creating a band program built upon comprehensive musicianship. Garofalo indicated that a successful comprehensive musicianship program consists of an objective-centered curriculum, containing instructional units based upon a major unit-study composition being rehearsed, band projects,
and a student resource notebook (p. 5). The instructional units focus teaching on complex structural elements, historical context, and developing aural, technical, and visual music skills (p. 29). Aesthetic education is at the top of his objective and curriculum chart as the context for all music learning. He believed that comprehensive musicianship is important to music students because they should develop aesthetic sensitivity to music and develop an appreciation for music as an art (p. 1). In his conclusion, Garofalo discussed ways to adapt comprehensive musicianship for small schools in which the band director has many time constraints and obligations that prevent him or her from planning an in-depth comprehensive curriculum; furthermore, he suggested that teachers entering a performance based program should implement comprehensive lessons slowly, as students may need time to adjust to the new teaching style (p. 93).

Variations of Garofalo’s (1983) and Labuta’s (1997) works appeared during the 1980s as thesies and dissertations concerning comprehensive musicianship curricula for school bands. Brokaw (1985) designed a comprehensive curriculum for high school bands that spread the teaching of eight musical elements over a four year program. The guide is a hierarchy of musical elements and concepts that serves as a list of what students should know and be able to do when they complete a four year band program. While Brokaw provided no teaching strategies to assist readers in how to use the guide, he gave suggestions on how to implement comprehensive musicianship into a traditionally performance based band program.

Bauer (1987) developed a sequential model for teaching comprehensive musicianship in grades 5-8. The model was designed to teach seven elements of music in a spiral fashion so that after students are introduced to a musical concept, they receive regular reinforcement and practice with increasing difficulty (p. iii). His purpose in designing the model was to give
students' experiences as composers, performers, writers, and scholars of music, so that they could become “critical listeners and consumers of music” (p. iv)”

In their 2001 text *Teaching Music in the Twenty-first Century*, Choksy et al. discussed the history of American music education, various educational movements in the United States, and methods of addressing the National Standards for Music Education (National Association for Music Education, 1994) in music classes using the following four prominent teaching philosophies: (a) the Delcroze method, (b) the Kodaly method, (c) the Orff approach, and (d) comprehensive musicianship. After describing the creation and objectives of each method, Choksy et al. addressed how to teach to the national standards in K-12 music classes by outlining sample lesson plans and describing teaching strategies for each grade level. Similar to Garofalo (1983) and Labuta (1997), Choksy et al.’s comprehensive musicianship lessons were project-based.

According to Sindberg (2009), a major movement in comprehensive musicianship began in 1977 when a group of music educators met at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin to discuss ways to add both breadth and depth to their performing ensembles’ musical experience (p. 25). She explained that the educators at the 1977 meeting examined several comprehensive musicianship initiatives and studies, including the works by Garofalo (1976) and Labuta (1972), and collaborated to create the *Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance* (CMP) model (Wisconsin Music Educators Association, 1977). The model placed emphasis on teaching the concept of “why” in ensemble settings and argued that performing ensembles should be the primary focus of music education in middle and high school programs (p. 34-37).

O’Toole’s (2003) text titled *Shaping Sound Musicians* is a modern guide to implementing comprehensive musicianship in lesson planning and score study, and is applicable to choral, band, and orchestra settings. O’Toole (2003) described methods of applying that planning to
daily lessons using techniques she and other contemporary comprehensive musicianship instructors have designed. Her work is based on the five points of the Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) model: (a) analysis, (b) outcomes, (c) strategies, (d) assessment, and (e) music selection (p. xi). The text contains examples of how to apply each of these points to three major works for school ensembles: Gustav Holst’s First Suite in E-flat, George Fredrich Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Eine Kleine Nachtmusik.

Just Good Teaching by Sindberg (2012) is another work that examined the use of the CMP model in modern band, orchestra, and choir classes. Sindberg explained CMP from the perspective of the student, the teacher, and the outsider watching a rehearsal. Similar to O’Toole (2003), she used Frank Ticheli’s popular setting of the American folk song, Shenandoah, as the primary example of implementing CMP. The book contains example lesson plans and narratives to assist the reader in deciding what to teach and recognizing how CMP works to foster student understanding. She used both historical and current research regarding comprehensive musicianship to corroborate her proposed teaching strategies.

Research in Comprehensive Musicianship

Various studies have been conducted to determine the existence and use of comprehensive musicianship in ensemble rehearsals. Cargill (1987) found that despite the amount of comprehensive musicianship training music education students received, it had no bearing on how much they implemented comprehensive musicianship in rehearsals. The study revealed that the use of comprehensive musicianship was based upon a band director’s opinion of the concept. If directors believe in comprehensive musicianship, they will use it despite dense performance schedules and pressures from principals and parents (p. 126).
Taylor (1991) conducted a similar study that investigated the use of comprehensive
musicianship in Ohio. He found that many public school teachers in Ohio believed that teaching
musical concepts is more important than emphasizing high performance quality; however, only
one-third of the survey respondents actually employed a comprehensive approach in their
classrooms. Paschall (2006) examined five popular beginning band methods to determine their
use of comprehensive musicianship. She found that only one of the five fully represented the
national standards for music education and contained a truly comprehensive method of music
study.

Brame (2011) studied the awareness, acceptance, and use of comprehensive musicianship
among band directors in Wisconsin and Illinois. Using an internet-based survey, he discovered
that directors in large schools containing more than 1,000 students implemented comprehensive
musicianship to a greater degree than directors in smaller schools. In addition, band directors in
Wisconsin indicated greater awareness and implementation of comprehensive musicianship than
band directors in Illinois. Wisconsin directors cited their exposure to the popular Comprehensive
Musicianship through Performance (CMP) model as one of the primary reasons they taught
comprehensively. Band directors who indicated they do not use comprehensive musicianship
cited heavy performance schedules, performance pressures from parents and administrators, and
lack of preparation time as hindrances (p. vii).

Studies concerning the effect of comprehensive musicianship on band students’
performance quality have yielded conflicting results. In an early experimental study, Garofalo
and Whaley (1979) compared the use of comprehensive musicianship with the use of traditional
performance methods of band instruction. The band that served as the experimental group was
taught using Garofalo’s (1976) unit study model of comprehensive musicianship instruction,
while the control group was taught with traditional performance methods. Garofalo and Whaley found that after a five week period, the students taught with the unit study model showed significantly higher increases in performance skills, aural skills, and conceptual knowledge than the students who were taught with a traditional approach (p. 142).

Whitener (1983) compared two beginning band methods of teaching. The experimental group was a 5th-grade beginning band class that was taught using comprehensive musicianship. The control group was a 5th-grade beginning band class taught with a traditional performance centered approach and consisted of students with ages, learning styles, and socio-economic statuses similar to that of the experimental group. Although overall performance quality showed no significant difference, the experimental group had learned intervallic listening and improvising significantly better than the control group, as shown on music performance and post-tests (p. 12-13).

Prominent Texts Pertaining to the Teaching of Instrumental Music

This section includes a review of instrumental music texts that are not specifically related to comprehensive musicianship, but contain valuable knowledge for school ensemble directors pertaining to advocacy, philosophies of music education, and rehearsal techniques.

Charles Hoffer’s (1983) text *Teaching Music in the Secondary Schools* contains many resources for band, orchestra, and general music teachers. The work is divided into several sections pertaining to philosophies of music education, designing music curricula, methods of teaching general and instrumental music, classroom management, and advocacy. Hoffer discussed the importance of teaching listening skills, aesthetics, style recognition and performance, and music theory through music classes. In addition, he stated that school music ensembles should “give performances because they have learned; they should not learn *only* to
give performances” (p. 319). Throughout the text, he corroborated many comprehensive musicianship principles by emphasizing the importance of music classes as part of the core school curriculum and stressing that performing ensembles must learn, not just entertain.

*The Creative Director: Alternative Rehearsal Techniques* is the first of two instrumental music texts by Edward Lisk (1991) that described methods of teaching musical concepts to performing ensembles. Lisk opened the work by discussing the importance of rehearsal structure to the human brain, stating that students’ best memory is during the first ten minutes of rehearsal, and by saying that “the first ten minutes of each rehearsal is the most critical regarding the proportion of information retained” (p. 2). His primary focus was developing creative ways of optimizing warm-up periods during instrumental rehearsals so that students learn without establishing a mindless routine. He provided many examples of how to teach style, harmony, listening, and performance fundamentals such as breath support and tone quality through exercises based on the circle of fourths.

In his second work, *The Creative Director: Conductor, Teacher, Leader*, Lisk (2006) continued discussing the use of alternative rehearsal techniques in rehearsals. He divided the techniques into three categories based upon the roles of an ensemble director as conductor, teacher, and leader. The duties of a conductor include listening to the ensemble and knowing what to listen for, establishing an understanding of ensemble sonority with the students, choosing quality literature, and communicating musical intent through clear and expressive conducting (p. 1-15). When discussing the role of the band director as a teacher, he supplemented his previous text, *The Creative Director: Alternative Rehearsal Techniques* (1991), by describing the use of the circle of fourths to teach harmonic progression, intonation, and expression. Finally, he described the role of the leader of an instrumental ensemble by outlining the role of instrumental
music in schools, the implications of the work of Howard Gardner on music classes, and the importance of advocacy. Similar to comprehensive musicianship principles, both of Lisk’s texts focused on students' performing with musical understanding and the need for music as an academic subject.

*Teaching Music Through Performance in Beginning Band* by Richard Miles and Thomas Dvorak (2001) contains six chapters on teaching elementary bands and a teacher resource guide to quality musical works that were written for beginning bands. In chapter two, Ramsey (2001) outlined goals and objectives for teaching musical concepts through beginning band performance. He explained that the first year of band instruction is crucial to creating musical understanding in students because it sets the foundation for instrumental performance skills, musical understanding, and practice routines. He said that in order to “train lifelong skill and enjoyment in music (p. 13),” teachers must focus on the following five goals in beginning band:

1. Tone quality
2. Technical training of basic playing fundamentals
3. Development of musical skills
4. Development of discriminatory skills
5. Instilling values and knowledge that enable students to be good consumers of music

Ramsey concluded by stating that in many instances students do not receive any formal music education beyond the beginning band, so it is in the best interest of the students that directors create a comprehensive program that teaches for musical development as well as technical ability (p. 26).

Robert Duke’s (2010) book *Intelligent Music Teaching* is a collection of essays that addressed the basic principles of effective music teaching. Duke discussed several aspects of the
teaching and learning process including assessment, sequencing instruction, feedback, and transfer. He believed that successful teachers plan their lessons based on what their students already know and what they want them to know. He explained the importance of having students use actions that demonstrate what they know by saying that “what we know in our heads is invisible to others, and what students know is invisible to teachers, until we express that knowledge in some way…that indicates what we know” (p. 34). By having students engaged in actions, teachers can make frequent assessments of progress and provide timely feedback. Finally, he said that building musical habits within students is essential to music teaching and learning because all learning requires active practice if the body and mind are to internalize subject matter (p. 60).
CHAPTER III: PROCEDURE

Subject Selection

The subject of this case study was an instrumental music teacher in District 1 of the Ohio Music Education Association (OMEA) who instructs middle school bands using comprehensive musicianship. For the purpose of this study, the term *middle school band* refers to a wind band consisting of students in grades six through eight. The term *comprehensive musicianship* refers to a method of teaching performing ensembles that involves the in-depth instruction of musical concepts, in addition to traditional performance techniques. Ten directors, selected based upon their reputation of success and my knowledge of middle school band directors in OMEA District 1, were contacted by e-mail and asked to complete a survey that ascertained their understanding and use of comprehensive musicianship. The survey (see Appendix A) included the following questions concerning comprehensive musicianship:

1. How do you define comprehensive musicianship?
2. Have you received instruction in using comprehensive musicianship teaching methods?
3. If so, where, and to what extent?
4. To what extent do you use comprehensive musicianship methods of instruction in your bands?
5. Which method books do you use and to what extent?

The survey also asked for the directors’ educational and professional background including: (a) degrees held and from which schools, (b) years of professional experience teaching instrumental ensembles, (c) grade levels they teach, (d) classes they teach, and (e) number of students they teach. Upon review of the returned surveys, five directors were found to have
perceptions of comprehensive musicianship that were similar to the definition used in this study. From those five, three stated that they use comprehensive teaching methods in their classrooms.

Mr. Richard Brimmer, Director of Bands at Lake Local Schools, was chosen as the subject of this case study because the answers in his survey demonstrated clear knowledge and implementation of comprehensive musicianship. Specifically, Brimmer defined comprehensive musicianship as, “teaching to all of the state standards in any type of music class. Even though I teach instrumental ensembles, I don't just teach how to play the instruments and how to perform as an ensemble. I include historical and cultural lessons as they pertain to the music we are studying. I include creativity (composing, arranging, improvising) as the music we are studying allows. I include cross-curricular themes that relate to the music lessons and listening skills are emphasized and lead to students using higher-order thinking skills like analysis, synthesis and evaluation” (see Appendix B). Brimmer’s belief in including composing, arranging, listening, and cross-curricular themes demonstrates that he feels band rehearsals should be more than technical “woodshedding” sessions.

Brimmer earned his bachelors and master’s degrees in music education from Bowling Green State University. He has been teaching instrumental music professionally for 26 years and has been the band director at Lake Local Schools for 22 years. In addition, he is a national board certified teacher. I asked Brimmer to be the subject of this study via e-mail. His return of the completed survey via e-mail served as his informed consent and agreement to be the subject of this study.
Data Collection

As stipulated by federal regulations, academic research involving human subjects requires approval from Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB), which I obtained prior to beginning the subject selection process (see Appendix C).

I held an initial conference with Brimmer to discuss logistical matters, such as (a) dates I would visit the school and make observations, (b) when I would conduct formal interviews with him; (c) when students would fill out a survey regarding their attitudes toward his teaching methods; and (d) what artifacts I would like to collect during my visits. After this initial conference, I sent an e-mail to the principal of Lake Middle School asking for his approval to conduct my study in his school. The principal sent me his approval in the form of an e-mail (see Appendix D).

I visited Brimmer’s school for a total of 16 full school days in March, April, and May of 2012: Monday through Friday, March 12-16; Monday through Thursday, April 2-5; Tuesday, April 10; Monday through Friday, April 23-27; Thursday afternoon, May 3; and Friday morning, May 4. In addition, I attended the Lake Middle School band concert on Tuesday, May 1, so I could observe the final product of Brimmer’s rehearsal cycle. I collected data in the following seven ways: (a) an entrance interview consisting of semi-structured questions conducted during my first full week of observation; (b) observations of the four middle school bands that I documented in a journal notebook; (c) video recordings of Brimmer’s class periods falling on a Tuesday or Thursday morning due to my teaching obligations; (d) observation notes that served as prompts for end-of-week reflective discussions with Brimmer to gain his reactions to class events; (e) a survey distributed to assenting band students during my final visits to determine their reactions to Brimmer’s instructional methods; (f) an exit interview consisting of semi-
structured questions conducted during my last full week of observation; and (g) artifacts, including method books used, quizzes and tests, major projects, performance assessment rubrics and any additional resources used in class.

During my visit, I observed two 6th-grade bands, one 7th-grade band, and one 8th-grade band. After finishing each week of observation I analyzed my observation notes to identify how Brimmer integrates comprehensive musicianship principles into daily rehearsals. I then labeled each of the teaching moments that were not direct performance instructions. For the purpose of this study, teaching moments refers to instances where Brimmer discusses in-depth musical concepts, in addition to basic performance directives. I created the list of labels based on my teaching experience as a middle school general music teacher for one year and as middle school band director for three years, and my extensive research on comprehensive teaching methods. The labels I assigned to teaching moments were (a) history or culture, (b) music theory, (c) style or performance practice, (d) how to play as an ensemble, (e) phrasing or melody, (f) cross-curricular or relation to other arts, (g) self or peer assessment, (h) musical independence, (i) transfer or application of knowledge, (j) teamwork, (k) analogy, (l) listening, and (m) teacher assessment. Basic performance directives that do not include the issue of why, such as “play a half note for two counts” or “play A-flat in third position,” were not labeled for analysis. I tallied the number of instances that each of these ideas were used in Brimmer’s teaching and kept track of them, organized by week and band, in my journal notebook. I used the tallies to determine how often he emphasized comprehensive musicianship principles in class.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Chapter four includes summaries of Brimmer’s answers during two interviews, a description of the school setting, summaries of my rehearsal observation notes, summaries of end of the week reflective discussions with Brimmer, results of the student survey, and a description of the artifacts I collected. The class observations are organized by week and by band. Comparisons between the bands are made in chapter five.

Interviews

Entrance Interview

Responses to questions one through twelve are my paraphrases of Brimmer’s comments during the entrance interview, which took place during my first full week of observation. Verbatim responses of his comments are presented in Appendix F.

1. On your subject survey, you defined comprehensive musicianship as “teaching to the state standards in any type of music class.” Can you explain how you came up with that definition?

Brimmer feels that NAfME’s nine national standards for music education outline the principles of comprehensive musicianship. The music education standards for the state of Ohio are modeled after the national standards in that singing, playing instruments, and learning other aspects of music are included. In every music class, regardless of level, music teachers should strive to touch upon all areas of music as defined by the standards. He believes that any teacher who teaches to the state or national standards is using comprehensive musicianship, even if they are not aware of it.
2. You said much of what you have learned about the importance of comprehensive musicianship came from trial and error and professional readings. Give some specific examples of resources, such as workshops or readings, that have given you teaching ideas.

Brimmer reads professional journals such as OMEA’s *Triad*, NAfME’s publications, and *The Instrumentalist*. While these journals do not always include articles on comprehensive musicianship, they do include articles concerning cultural issues and cross-curricular themes that can be useful. These articles help him choose literature that creates an interconnection with what students are studying in other classes, such as historical time periods or studying rhythms in band and working on fractions in math.

3. Why is learning in a comprehensive manner important for middle school band students?

According to Brimmer, students join band because they want to play songs. He commented that “we can train monkeys to play songs.” He strives to teach students more because he wants them to learn how to interpret music, why the composer writes the way he or she does, and how to make intelligent musical decisions. His goal is to give students the tools they need to understand and play music without his assistance. If students do not learn in a comprehensive manner, they are just playing notes and rhythms. Students who are musically independent performers will be musically independent consumers.

4. Are there any cons to teaching in a comprehensive manner?

The only con is that it takes a lot of effort and time on one’s part to come up with comprehensive methods and ways to relate material because many teachers are not taught how to do it, and people tend to teach how they are taught. Since he has been putting in the effort to teach this way for many years, it has become “second nature.”
5. In your survey, you mentioned the importance of exploring cultural and historical issues in the music you perform. Describe some ways you study these elements in class.

An excellent example of this is illustrated by the music the 6th-grade band has been playing. *Cossack Marching Song* and *Mount Vernon March* are both marches but have different cultural origins and are performed in different styles. Brimmer wanted the students to understand the compositional differences between the two marches, the performance implications, and why they are performed differently. Knowing the concept of “why” gives added meaning to the students and makes a more lasting impression.

6. Would you say that knowing “why” has improved your student’s learning efficiency?

Brimmer believes that knowing cultural backgrounds and the “why” factor, “absolutely” improve student learning efficiency because it prepares middle school students to make good musical decisions when they are presented with advanced repertoire in the high school band. His high school band excelled at sight reading when they participating in the OMEA large group adjudication. According to Brimmer, when the sight reading judge gave the band time to discuss the music, prior to their performance, the room “erupted” with conversation. He was pleased because the students discussed more than basic performance issues such as rhythm and key signature. They discussed stylistic changes and expression as they tried to understand what the music was about. Teaching students to think about music in this manner while in middle school has a lasting positive effect throughout a student’s musical career.

7. What are some ways you have included cross-curricular themes in your middle school bands?

Mathematics is one cross-curricular theme that Brimmer emphasizes in his rehearsals; rhythms and fractions of the beat relate to fractions in math classes. Another subject that he relates music to is English. Foreshadowing and climax are themes that translate between
literature and musical compositions. When students see concepts in more than one setting, they are more likely to develop a better understanding of those concepts.

8. How to you develop individual and group creativity, specifically, composing, arranging, and improvising in your middle school bands?

The *Measures of Success* method book that Brimmer uses in 6th-grade band includes exercises in composing, arranging, and improvising. The method book introduces these concepts to students early and contains exercises to develop their understanding as they progress through the book. One example is an exercise that requires the students to take the song *Alouette*, which is written in 4/4 time, and write it in 2/4 time. This allows the students to assume the role of arranger, without needing to change the melody. With the 7th and 8th-grade bands, he has given rhythmic or melodic composition assignments in which the students are asked to write eight measures, within given parameters, and perform them for the class. He said that he does not have many opportunities to teach improvisation because he does not have a jazz band or suitable middle school literature that asks for it.

9. Can you describe your process for creating long-term goals and short-term objectives for your bands?

The first thing Brimmer considers is what his students currently know, and what he wants them to know by the time they graduate. Another issue he considers is what students need in order to become lifelong consumers of music. In addition to knowing how to read notes and rhythms, students must be able to make evaluations of music. Choosing a method book that includes lessons in evaluating music is a good start. His short-term objectives change each year depending on the success his students have learning various concepts. Bands have varying
challenges such as rhythmic difficulties or trouble hearing partials, so he chooses repertoire that allows him to improve issues such as these and teach new concepts.

10. What are your long-term goals for your 6th-grade beginning band?

Brimmer would like his beginning band to be able to follow him as conductor, listen across the band to see how their part fits into the group, and to be able to play as part of a group and not just as an individual. He would like his students to learn to be musically independent so he does not have to remind them of balance issues, dynamic changes, or their part’s role in the ensemble.

11. What are your long-term goals for your 7th-grade band?

Brimmer wants his 7th grade band to focus on how to shape phrases, learn more scales and rudiments, and extend their ranges. He works to develop a dark, full band sound by emphasizing tone quality and expanding instrumentation. Seventh grade band is a “juggling match” because he must continue to develop maturing students while catching-up students who have switched to instruments such as tuba or tenor saxophone, or have joined band a year late without any previous musical experience. He wants the 7th-grade band to take the concepts learned in 6th-grade band to the next level.

12. What are your long-term goals for your 8th-grade band?

At the beginning of the school year, Brimmer tells his 8th-grade band that their 8th-grade year is their opportunity to prove to him that they are ready for high school band. He continues to emphasize improving range, intonation, and tone while introducing in-depth musical learning. He assigns the “guide to musicality” assignment to his 8th-grade band students, which requires them to get background information on composers, analyze compositional devices, and research cultural aspects of the music they are performing. He wants his students to think about ways to
research musical information and apply that information to when they interpret the music. Another goal that he has for his 8th-grade band is that they learn to think critically about performances and be able to give constructive criticism that can help them better perform their music.

Exit Interview

Responses to questions one through twelve are my paraphrases of Brimmer’s comments during the exit interview, which took place during my final week of observation. Verbatim responses of his comments are presented in Appendix F.

1. How many years accrued between your bachelors and master’s degrees and what type of professional or other experiences did you have during that time?

   Approximately 12 years accrued between Brimmer’s earning his bachelors and master’s degrees in music education from Bowling Green State University. For a couple of years, he could not find a teaching position in the area where he desired to work, so he worked a full time job outside of teaching and substitute taught as his schedule allowed. He felt that working as a substitute teacher would help him locate a teaching position and get his “foot in the door” if positions became available. After a year of substitute teaching, he found a job at a local parochial high school, where he worked as the director of bands for grades 5-12. During his time there, he explored other facets of the music field such as composing, performing, and music business. The joy of watching his students’ progress affirmed to him that music education was the area of music he enjoyed working in most.

2. In what ways have standards for music education, both national and state, affected your teaching? Begin by telling me when the standards first affected how you teach.
Brimmer began his teaching career by teaching in ways that mimicked how his high school band directors taught. In the late 1980s, he read about NAfME’s voluntary national standards for music education in several professional journals that suggested that teachers include composition, arranging, singing, and improvising in their classes. He used the journals to help find ways to use his performance literature to teach those aspects of music as he prepared the students for their concerts. His professional readings also helped him realize what aspects of music he was not regularly including in his classes. He believes that teaching higher order thinking skills such as analytical listening helps students achieve a deep understanding of music and creates a “stellar band program” that results in students who can play music, not just songs.

3. How do you hope students will have changed musically, and as human beings, as a result of your teaching?

Brimmer’s hope is that when students leave his program, they will have an appreciation for what it takes to produces all types of music, whether it be jazz, rock, concert band literature, or playing guitars on a street corner. He feels that if students can understand the effort it takes to produce various types of musical performances, even if they do not enjoy the music itself, they will be strong consumers of music. As with athletes, musicians must put in hard work and practice if they are going to become good at their craft; raw talent is not enough. Finally, he believes that studying why composers write the way that they do and the message they were trying to convey through their composition helps students gain a stronger appreciation for music than only performing music.

4. Starting with your 6th grade band, what methods of assessment do you use, and do you prefer one method of assessment over another?
Brimmer uses conversational discussions with students to keep them actively engaged and to give them the opportunity make musical decisions. He asks them to make interpretive choices in different sections of their performance literature, perform them as a group, and then discuss the effectiveness of their performance compared to other ways of performing. He feels that the key to assessment is finding the students who do not voluntarily respond to class discussions and drawing them into the activity so he can make sure they are developing with the rest of the class.

Another common form of assessment Brimmer uses is playing tests. In all of his bands, he assigns pieces of music from method books or sections of their performance literature as test music and grades student performance based on a rubric. He uses a different rubric for each grade level depending on where the bands are developmentally. Students receive their grades based upon their execution of musical tasks, good tone quality, etc.

Brimmer prefers using assessments that are not graded. For example, he often watches his students perform and provides them with immediate feedback. He believes that while summative assessment is important because parents want to know why their students earned the grades they received, that is not the most important part of education. Listening, watching, and discussing provide information on a real-time basis and help students learn quickly.

5. *There is an educational philosophy, commonly referred to as “teach to the top”, what are your feelings regarding this?*

Brimmer feels that students who possess what Howard Gardiner refers to as “musical intelligence” will quickly understand basic musical concepts and need to be challenged. He said that if the class remains challenging, then the course of the class will progress at a good pace. Teachers who only teach to the lowest level student will leave the students who do not have
difficulties feeling bored and their talents will not develop as they should. Students who need extra work and attention to understand class material will be able to keep up if they are pushed by their teachers to succeed, because the class environment will be suitable for growth. If teachers only work toward proficiency, then students only become concerned with being “good enough,” when they should be focused on mastery.

6. **How do you balance challenging gifted students with teaching students who are having difficulty?**

According to Brimmer, this is the challenge that affects band directors more than most other subjects such as social students and science. During any given class, band directors are not teaching one lesson; they are teaching a flute lesson, a clarinet lesson, and several other lessons at the same time. He said that it is a juggling act to challenge and teach all students during a given class because each student has different needs and abilities that need to be attended too. Teachers need to monitor how much time they are spending with each group so they can give ample attention to as many needs as possible. He believes that he is as successful with it as he can be, but there are still moments when he feels he did not attend to as many student problems as he should have.

7. **How often do you formally assess and grade your students?**

Brimmer does many assessments, in the form of small projects, with his 6th-grade band. As his 6th graders possess limited playing abilities, these small projects are handouts or worksheets that assess the students’ ability to read and write basic notation, and identify fingerings. He assigns formal performance assessments after the students have had several weeks of beginning performance instruction. With 7th and 8th-grade bands, he formally assesses student performance progress once a quarter (9 weeks). During a specified week, he records students
playing excerpts of their concert literature during rehearsals, listens to the recordings after
school, and uses grading rubrics that include comments. He also conducts seating auditions once
per semester and issues a grade for their performance in the audition.

8. How much experience do you have with student teachers, and how do you hope to have
influenced them after having you as their mentor?

Brimmer has had nine student teachers during his career. One of the primary issues he
focuses on with student teachers is how to talk to students in ways they can understand. Many of
his student teachers had excellent musical skills but did not know how to talk to someone who
does not already know what is being taught. In addition, he helped his student teachers with their
presentation style and classroom management skills. He noticed when music education students
practice teaching in their college classes, they usually practice by teaching their peers that are of
similar age and knowledge level. College music students do not experience the same classroom
management issues when teaching fellow college students as they do when teaching middle
school students. One of his student teachers told him that they would like to learn more analogies
and stories to use to relate material to other aspects of life. The student teacher commented that
he noticed students had greater understanding of what was being taught when Brimmer told
stories or related musical concepts to other life lessons. Brimmer encourages student teachers to
come up with multiple ways of saying things or teaching concepts so they can accommodate
multiple learning styles. He feels that using analogies or giving multiple examples of musical
concepts outside of the current context is an excellent way to teach comprehensively. Bringing in
other facets of life, arts, or subjects, to assist in teaching music is a common teaching method
used by teachers daily, and whether they realize it or not, is comprehensive musicianship.

9. Who is one music education philosopher who has had a significant impact on your teaching?
Brimmer feels that Bennett Reimer has had a significant impact on the world of music education, and somewhat influenced his teaching. He does not completely agree with everything Reimer believes, because he feels that only teaching music for music’s sake is not enough justification for the public to maintain the arts in the schools. Brimmer feels that one must show that music programs address the needs of the whole student and can relate to other parts of life if the public is to really see a need for music in school. Dr. Vincent J. Kantorski, Professor of Music Education at Bowling Green State University, has had a major impact on Brimmer’s teaching philosophy because he introduced him to a variety of music education philosophers and authors, to music education research, and to important teaching philosophies, such as comprehensive musicianship. Kantorski encouraged Brimmer and his fellow students to include research and philosophy into their everyday teaching. Brimmer feels that Dr. Peter Boonshaft has had the most significant impact on his teaching. Brimmer tries to emulate Boonshaft by using creative methods to get the best results out of students.

Rehearsal Observation Notes

*School Setting*

Lake Middle School is a suburban school located in Millbury, a suburb of Toledo, Ohio. A total of 406 students attend Lake Middle School: 148 in sixth grade, 127 in seventh grade and 131 in eighth grade. There are 69 students in the 6th-grade band, 57 students in the 7th-grade band and 32 in the 8th-grade band. Brimmer meets with his 6th-grade, 7th-grade, and 8th-grade bands daily and has instrumental lessons with his 6th-grade band students on a rotating basis. The large size of the 6th-grade band requires that the band is split into two periods. The eighth period 6th-grade band consists mostly of honors students, while the fourth period 6th-grade band is
comprised of students in standard 6th-grade classes. The fourth period and eighth period classes combine and perform as a single 6th-grade band.

**Week 1**

**Fourth Period 6th-Grade Band**

Teaching moments in March, during my first week of observation, with the fourth period 6th-grade band consisted primarily of references to style or performance practice, statements that required students to be musically independent, and analogies. Style and musical independence were each referred to in seven teaching moments while analogies were used in eight teaching moments.

In one teaching moment, Brimmer addressed style as he explained the origins of “march style” during a rehearsal of the piece, *Mount Vernon March*. He asked the ensemble where marches come from. When a student correctly exclaimed, “the military!”, he said that marches were written for military marching bands to play as a way of helping troops march from one place to another at a steady pace while keeping morale high. He continued by saying that using strong “T” sounds on the front of the notes and adding space between the notes keeps the troops moving together at a precise pace. To help students relate this to the music they were rehearsing, he commented, “keep this in mind as we play at measure nine.” Then he led the group in a performance trial that resulted in the band’s playing with more space between their notes and clear “T” attacks. Though his teaching moment primarily concerned style, he also included a brief music history lesson, explained “march style” performance practice, and made a transfer statement that asked students to apply what he discussed to the music they were about to play.

Another discussion about style or performance practice occurred on the following day as Brimmer rehearsed a piece titled *Cossack Marching Song*, which was in their method book. He
asked the class if they knew anything about Cossacks. After several incorrect answers, one student said “a Russian.” He agreed and told the students that knowing the culture that a song comes from can influence how it should be performed. “Russian marches are different from American marches,” he commented. The use of “T” sounds but no space between the notes is one way Russian marches can be performed differently from American marches. Similar to the previous day’s rehearsal, Brimmer did not just tell the students what he wanted them to do. Instead, he gave instruction on culture and performance practice.

Brimmer works to make his students musically independent in his class. He wants them to make musical decisions about performance without needing to be told exactly what to do by another individual. An example of his use of musical independence in rehearsals occurred shortly after his discussion about the Cossack Marching Song. Although the students had improved stylistically, they were not playing full musical phrases because they were taking breaths more often than once every four measures as the music indicated. He told the students that when he asks them to breathe properly and play with the correct phrasing, they do it, but when he does not mention it in each song, they do not use proper phrasing. He stressed to the students that it is important that they be musically independent and identify where to take a breath without help. During the rest of the rehearsal, the students made noticeable efforts to play full phrases before taking a breath. Brimmer told the class that they should never leave rehearsal without feeling tired. Breathing deeply and fully exhaling requires effort, but it will become easy over time.

At times, Brimmer’s statements concerning musical independence can be as simple as a short comment before the group performs. For example, during the warm up on another day in March, the band had just finished rehearsing the B-flat scale. Just before he began conducting the band through a performance on the E-flat scale he said “see the key, see the change?” While the
band played, several students made note mistakes on the fourth scale degree, which is flatted in the E-flat scale. Brimmer asked “who heard mistakes? If you didn’t, that means you weren’t paying attention to what’s around you. You can’t focus on just you; hear the group, not just you.” Before the group played, he used a single comment to prompt the band members to think about the difference between the keys of B-flat and E-flat. When the group made key signature mistakes, he asked the class if they had been listening to how their notes matched up with the people around them.

Brimmer frequently uses analogies when teaching his fourth period 6th-grade band. When giving instructional statements, he finds other facets of life that he can relate to the musical element he is discussing. Some analogies are used to teach major musical concepts such as music theory or style and others are used to make quick instructional statements that he hopes will make his reasons for the statement clear. For example, he used an analogy to teach a major concept when the band was rehearsing the E-flat scale. He mentioned that the notes in the E-flat scale are the same as the notes in the B-flat scale, except for the one note that the key signature changes. He explained this by pointing at one flute player and saying “student X in 4th period, student X at lunch and student X at home are the same person. Just because she is in a different place, that doesn’t mean she becomes someone else.” Brimmer wanted students to realize that when learning a new scale in the circle of fourths, they play the same notes as before with one exception; a new starting note does not mean the rest of the notes are different from before.

Another example of using analogies occurred later in the same rehearsal when Brimmer was telling the students that all players must make changes in dynamics at the same time if they are to be effective. Throughout the rehearsal, the band took several beats to change from one dynamic to another when the change was supposed to be instantaneous. He believed that students
were not being musically independent, which is why they were taking too long to make dynamic changes. After a full group trial that required them to change from forte to mezzo-forte, he stated that “we got the volume change because we heard other people do it. You have to know to do it on your own. If you go to lunch during fifth period because your friends do, that’s the wrong reason to go to lunch. If you only do it because a friend did it, you aren’t learning why to do it. It says mezzo-forte because the composer is trying to say something here. You will have to play all alone someday and no one will be there to tell you what to do; you will be expected to make these decisions on your own.”

An example of a quick instructional statement occurred on the next day, after the band played the E-flat scale in 3rds from their method book. Brimmer commented, “just like professional baseball players use batting cages, musicians use scales; scales help us play songs.” This analogy made the connection between a baseball player and a musician. Practicing the basic skill of swinging a bat and connecting with a ball is very similar to a musician’s being able to play scales accurately and therefore, better play notes in a song that move in scale-like patterns.

Eighth Period 6th-grade Band

Phrasing and melody, playing as an ensemble, and music theory were the focus of Brimmer’s rehearsals with his eighth period 6th-grade band. During my first week of observation, phrasing and melody was discussed six times, playing as an ensemble was emphasized seven times, and music theory was discussed ten times. Lessons regarding style and analogies were each used six times with the eighth period group in a manner consistent with his teaching methods in his fourth period class and are not separately explained here.

While he was rehearsing a piece of music from the method book, Brimmer stopped to compliment the group for not making key signature mistakes. Next, he told the band to not chop
off notes at the end of the phases. He sang examples of good and bad phrase endings to reinforce his point. After a full group trial, he said that while the phrase endings had improved, some students were still breathing at different points in the melody rather than after four measures. He demonstrated the strange stops in the melody caused by breathing by speaking several sentences in which he paused at random points. The broken sentences that did not flow helped the students see that stopping in the middle of a sentence before completing a thought is similar to breathing before completing a musical idea.

Two days later, Brimmer discussed phrasing that was more advanced than he had in prior classes. He said that since the band had been performing full phrases, it was time for them to create movement in the phrase by performing a crescendo for two measures, followed by a decrescendo for two measures. He asked them to think about more than breathing and create “rise and fall” within the music. When he led the group through a performance trial of *Mount Vernon March*, he heard that the melody was phrasing well because the melodic contour rose and fell like the dynamics he asked for. During the trio, he told the brass to listen to the shape of the melody and play their accompaniment part with shape by matching the melody. He said that accompaniment does not mean to play just one volume, but how they shaped their phrase affected how the melody sounded.

One example of how Brimmer emphasized playing as an ensemble occurred when he was addressing balance in the *Mount Vernon March*. The alto saxophone section was playing loudly throughout the rehearsal without paying attention to whether or not their part was important. Brimmer asked the class to tell him how to determine when it is acceptable to play louder than others. One student volunteered the answer, “when you have the melody.” Brimmer loudly sang an excerpt from the saxophone part that included several bars of melody and accompaniment. He
instructed the students to recognize when they do or do not have the melody and make appropriate volume adjustments. The example he sang showed the students that an accompaniment part or supporting harmony is not as aurally important as the melody and should not be played at a volume that distracts the audience. Balance in relation to the melody was emphasized throughout the rest week one.

Music theory was the most discussed concept during week one. Brimmer’s first theory lesson occurred during a B-flat scale warm-up. Following a performance trial, he asked the class if they remembered why the clarinets, alto saxophones, and trumpets do not start on B-flat in the B-flat concert scale. When no student raised their hand to respond, he told them that clarinets, trumpets, and alto saxophones are called transposing instruments. The range of those three instruments requires that notes are written differently than concert pitch instruments so they can read the majority of their notes in the staff, otherwise, they would need to use ledger lines which can be challenging to read. He continued by saying that when Adolph Sax invented the many different types of saxophones, he made them transposing so a saxophone player needed to learn only one set of fingerings. While the soprano, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophone sound in different ranges, the fingerings for the notes are all the same. He asked each section to discuss the interval between the notes they play and the concert pitch names. Each section took a few seconds to discuss their note name interval and then shared their response with Brimmer. If a group was incorrect he gave the correct answer and used examples of various note name intervals. At the end of the discussion, he reminded the group that they need to remember their concert pitch transposition so he can say a single note name and everyone can play the pitch together as one way of making rehearsals efficient. Brimmer’s saxophone origin story gave students a practical context so they could understand both how transposition works, and why.
Another example of Brimmer’s use of music theory took place during the following day’s warm-up. After the band made mistakes with E-flat scale’s key signature, he told the band, “there are only twelve possible notes; the key signature tells you which ones to use.” He informed the group that if they remember the names of the sharps or flats in their scale, they need to apply them to the musical alphabet and play the notes in alphabetical order, starting with their first note. He also stated that scale and key signature mean the same thing and songs are written based on the notes of a scale. As the band turned in their method books to the *Cossack Marching Song*, he asked them what key signature, or scale, was used in the song. A student correctly answered, E-flat. Before their first rehearsal of the song, he asked the band to remember the sharps or flats of the E-flat scale and apply them to this song. He gave his theory lesson during his E-flat scale rehearsal to help the students accurately perform *Cossack Marching Song*’s key signature. The theory lesson was valuable because it had direct application to the repertoire they were rehearsing in class. Brimmer gave theory lessons during each warm-up that applied to what the band rehearsed.

7th-Grade Band

During week one, music theory, musical independence, and balance or playing as an ensemble were the most frequently used teaching tools. References to music theory and musical independence each occurred five times and instructions regarding balance or how to play as an ensemble occurred ten times. All references to the above were used in context with the repertoire being rehearsed in class.

Brimmer’s theory lessons during week one concentrated on the relationship between E-flat major, C minor, and the Michael Sweeney composition, *Aztalan: City of Mystery*. During a performance of the E-flat scale he stopped the baton on C concert, the sixth scale degree. After
the band released the note, he asked them to play the E-flat scale again, starting on C concert, the
note they just stopped on. The band made several note mistakes as they attempted to play what
their director asked. Brimmer wrote the following on the whiteboard:

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Eb  F  G  Ab  Bb  C  D  Eb
C  D  Eb  F  G  Ab  Bb  C
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He asked the percussionists playing keyboard instruments to play the scale starting on C as
written above. When they finished, he told the class that they played the same notes, but by
starting the E-flat scale in a new place, they performed a C minor scale. He continued and said
that songs can be either major or minor depending on the arrangement of a song’s melody notes.
The key signature and note arrangement in the piece tell them where “home” is.

Brimmer told the group that Aztalan has the same key signature as E-flat, but C is the
home note, which means Aztalan is in C minor. He led the group in short rehearsals of two spots
in the piece and asked the group if the music conveys a happy or sad feeling. Several students
shouted “sad!” He informed the band that using C as the home note and basing the song on the C
minor scale is what creates the sad sound.

Later in the week, Brimmer repeated the E-flat to C minor warm-up before playing
Aztalan and led an abridged version of the previous discussion so he could reinforce the C minor
concept. In addition, he rehearsed the A-flat scale before the band performed Whipsaw March,
and he made several references to the relationship between scale, key signature and song as he
did with his 6th-grade bands. The key signatures of the pieces he rehearsed with the 7th-grade
band determined which scales he used during warm-ups.

One method of demanding musical independence of his 7th-grade band students was to
instill in them a sense of individual responsibility. The band made several key signature and note
mistakes during 10 minutes of rehearsal on *Whipsaw March*. When the band did not improve after 10 minutes of part drilling, Brimmer stated, “every teacher, judge, or director would say that all the wrong notes and key signature mistakes are individual responsibilities. You need to fix them on your own. The group cannot fix your individual problems. We show you how to fix them, you do it.” After a few more minutes of rehearsal, he tried to convey that there are several different parts happening in the music and they are all equally important; however, the audience will not be able to tell because too many people cannot play them. He commented, “take responsibility for yourself and your section and learn your parts so we don’t have to re-teach notes.”

Student participation in the Ohio Music Education Association’s solo and ensemble festival was another way Brimmer fostered musical independence in his students. One of the band rehearsals was devoted to solo and ensemble. Students who played a solo or an ensemble piece spent the period working on their festival music and receiving help from Brimmer. About one-third of the class did not participate in the festival, and these students were asked to silently work on homework while he assisted the participating students.

Balance was discussed several times throughout week one’s rehearsals. Brimmer spent the entirety of one rehearsal with balance as the center focus. After the first run through of the E-flat scale, he told the band to not start as loud as they had been. He discussed pyramid balance and the importance of the bass as the loudest voice and said, “fit into the bass sound, don’t make them play up to you.” While rehearsing *Whipsaw March*, he asked each different part to play separately at measure 29. After five different groups played he told the band that all five parts were equally important. He instructed the band to listen as they played and to make sure they
could hear all five parts as they played. If they could not hear all parts, they were playing too loud.

He continued the balance discussion by having the flute and trumpet parts play along with the alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and the horn parts. He explained that the two parts combined created a call and response effect that is similar to a game of tennis; one group plays the part, the other group plays it back. For call and response to be effective, the group that is playing the accompaniment, or longer notes, must play soft until they take over the melody. Once the call and response was rehearsed, he had the full group play at measure 29. After the group played both first and second endings, he stopped the band and addressed the trombones. He told them that their part was marked as “2nd time only,” and that meant that they were the only addition or change during the second time through the section beginning at measure 29. This meant that they were the most important voice.

8th-Grade Band

Music theory was the primary comprehensive topic covered during rehearsals with the 8th-grade band. While Brimmer spoke briefly about style and made statements about how to transfer knowledge from one context to another, the majority of class time was spent fixing technical or rhythmic problems with individual parts. He mentioned several times that the students needed to spend more time learning their individual parts and taking responsibility for themselves. In one rehearsal he told the students that “we can’t get rhythm if all you are going to do is push buttons.”

Music theory was addressed during each band rehearsal by warming up with four scales from the circle of fourths. Each day, Brimmer led the band in playing the B-flat, E-flat, A-flat and D-flat scales. All four scales were played on quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes.
When moving from scale to scale, he reminded the band that only one note changes between scales. The note that was the seventh note becomes the fourth note and is flatted. During one rehearsal, he told the band that college students and professionals practice the same scales they do, except at a more advanced level. He said that scales are a major part of every musician’s practice. To make his point, he played a scale exercise on the marimba that he practiced daily in college.

The 8th-grade band learned rhythmic theory through performance of *Songs of Scotland*, a work that contained a section in 6/8 time. The 8th-grade band was the only band to have lessons concerning 6/8 time. Before beginning rehearsal on the 6/8 section, Brimmer drew a note value diagram that showed the progression of note values from dotted half notes, to sixteenth notes. He instructed the class to keep the dotted quarter note pulse and count the underlying sixteenth note subdivision. When the snare drum and flutes made rhythmic mistakes, he sang the melody and compared it to the subdivision. Both groups performed better. He often modeled the rhythm and sang parts to students as they rehearsed *Songs of Scotland* because they had no prior experience with 6/8 time.

*Week Two*

*Fourth Period 6th-grade Band*

During my second week of observation, the major concepts that Brimmer addressed were the transfer or application of knowledge, musical independence, and analogies. He focused on the transfer or application of knowledge in eight teaching moments, musical independence in 16 teaching moments, and used analogies in 14 teaching moments. Musical independence was the most frequently addressed issue because he emphasized the importance of team work and helping one another understand musical concepts more than he had in the first week of
observation. Because his use of analogy was consistent with what I had seen in previous observations of the fourth period 6th-grade band, specific examples are not reported here.

Much of rehearsal time was focused on transferring skills from one context to another, specifically in terms of performing dynamic changes, ritardandos, and following the director. In one rehearsal, Brimmer led an E-flat scale warm up that required the band to change notes as the baton moved. He conducted freely and did not use a steady tempo. This required the students to pay close attention and move with the baton. After the band made several note errors and did not play together as he moved the baton, he told them that their best band sound comes from playing precisely together. He asked them to stop worrying about playing right notes. Instead, they should follow the baton, and listen around the room so they can play together. The band performed the scale again and more of the band played together; however, some students continued to have difficulty changing notes with the rest of the group. He explained further that the band’s trouble with staying together is an issue during the ritardandos in *Music of the Night* and that this exercise is designed to help them learn to watch so ritardandos can be effective. To facilitate transfer, he followed the warm-up with a rehearsal of the excerpt in *Music of the Night* that contained two full band ritardandos.

While rehearsing *Music of the Night*, the trumpets did not play the ritardando at measure 27 because they were having difficulty remembering fingerings. Brimmer told the trumpets to stop worrying so much about pushing the right buttons and that “it doesn’t matter if you get the right notes at the wrong time, it still sounds wrong.” He used the analogy of a group of friends riding their bikes in the street and told them to keep their bikes in a straight line by pedaling at the same speed as their neighbor. No one bike should slow down or speed up out of sync with the
others. The band made noticeable improvements by the end of the rehearsal, and he reiterated the importance of ensemble precision throughout the week’s rehearsals.

During several teaching moments, Brimmer asked the students to help each other develop skills and learn musical concepts by asking them to discuss a concept with their neighbors before a performance trial, and by encouraging them to help one another fix mistakes. After playing an E-flat scale warm-up, he told the students that they were going to continue warming up by playing the A-flat scale. He reminded them that there is only a one note difference between the E-flat scale and the A-flat scale, and he instructed them to “talk in your sections and figure out which note that is.” After allowing the students to discuss the matter for approximately 15 seconds, he led them through a successful performance trial of the A-flat scale.

During a rehearsal of *American Fantasy*, several trumpet players made the mistake of playing B-flat rather than B natural. He told the trumpets that they have made that mistake too many times, while the flutes helped each other to fix that mistake several rehearsals ago. He said to the trumpets that were playing correctly, “don’t let your neighbors play wrong, help them.” The next day, he stopped after an A-flat scale warm-up and said to the students, “some of us are still having trouble. If you are in their section, help them and remind them of the right notes.” He asked this of the students again when they played incorrect notes in the F concert scale. Rather than correct the group himself he instructed the students by saying “help your neighbors who may have made a mistake. Now, try again.”

*Eighth Period 6th-Grade Band*

During my second week of observation, the eighth period 6th-grade band had a firm grasp on their concert repertoire. To keep the band from becoming bored with their concert music, Brimmer spent most of the week rehearsing pieces from their method book. Through their
rehearsals, he emphasized musical independence, music theory, and style. Musical independence and style were each focused on 12 times and music theory was taught 15 times. Musical independence and music theory were taught with more depth than in week one’s lessons. Because his teaching of style was consistent with what I had seen in previous observations of the eighth period 6th-grade band, specific examples are not reported here.

One example of in-depth musical independence occurred while the band was rehearsing an arrangement of *Kum-Bay-Ya* from their method book. After a performance trial in which several brass players had difficulty playing the correct partials, Brimmer asked the students to sing through the exercise. Several band members sang quietly, while others did not sing at all and laughed. One student commented that they should not have to sing in band. Brimmer responded by saying that band students who can sing their parts play better than those who cannot sing their parts. He continued by saying that “singing and hearing notes tells us when we got our part right. Monkeys can push buttons, but we must describe what is right and wrong about how we played.” He led the band through another sing-through of the arrangement and most of the students sang well. After the sing-through, he informed the students that “we will keep singing to help us hear better. Brass players have to be able to sing because pushing valves does not guarantee right notes.”

Over the course of two rehearsals, Brimmer introduced the band to the concept of minor key signatures. During a rehearsal of an arrangement of *Hatikvah*, the Israeli national anthem, he asked the class to tell him the key signature they were playing. A student answered “E-flat.” Brimmer asked the class that if they are playing in the key of E-flat, why does the song not start or end on the note E-flat. When no one answered, he explained that not every key or scale is major and that this song is not E-flat major because the home note is C. As the band rehearsed
the same piece on the next day, he played a set of major chords and a set of minor chords on the piano and labeled them one and two. He asked the band to tell him which set of chords sounded like it best fit the melody of the song. Several students shouted “two!” He agreed with them and told them that by starting a scale on a new home note and keeping the same key signature, you can change the mood of the music. One of the students asked, “if this is a national anthem, why does it sound so dreary?” Brimmer responded by telling him that Hatikvah is based on a minor scale and minor scales have what our culture considers sad or serious sounds. He continued by explaining that American music uses more major sounds, other cultural groups such as Native Americans and Asians use pentatonic scales, and some use minor scales; it depends on one’s culture.

7th-Grade Band

7th-grade band rehearsals consisted of lessons concerning playing as an ensemble, musical independence, and phrasing. There were 13 teaching moments regarding ensemble issues, 12 regarding musical independence, and 8 regarding phrasing. Brimmer used analogies in ten teaching moments to assist with the above concepts. During each band rehearsal, he used a digital audio recorder to record individuals for a performance assessment. During full group performance trials, one student played into the digital recorder so their sound was captured. After each trial, the recorder was passed to the next person in the row so the process could be repeated. Brimmer used performance rubrics when grading the students’ recordings.

A unique teaching moment pertaining to musical independence occurred during my second week of observation when Brimmer asked the students who participated in the OMEA solo and ensemble festival to speak to the class regarding their experiences. Several students said that participating in the event made them feel good because they gave strong performances and
felt a sense of accomplishment. Other students said that they became better musicians because they had to practice more than usual to prepare their music and had to be more confident on their parts because, in most cases, they had to play them independently. Brimmer commented that he was too shy and nervous to play in front of others when he was in seventh grade. He praised the students who participated and encouraged those who did not participate in solo and ensemble to do so next year.

Many of the ensemble issues rehearsed in my second week of observation concerned group execution of dynamics and balance. While playing *Whipsaw March*, several members of the band did not perform dynamic changes with the rest of the ensemble. Brimmer told the group that for dynamics to be effective everyone must perform the changes, but unfortunately not everyone does. He related this to a group needing to raise money for a goal. If everyone does not chip in their share, the rest of the group has to try to make up for the missing money and that’s not fair. Every individual is responsible for putting in the correct change and putting in their fair share of effort to make dynamics work.

During an E-flat scale warm-up on the following day, Brimmer drew two pictures on the board. One picture was a box with the words “you now” written in it and the other picture was a pyramid with the words “you when you sound good.” He asked the group to play the A-flat scale and made a slanted line gesture with his left arm as he conducted to indicate one side of a pyramid, referring to the pyramid balance. He asked the class to tell him what the picture on the board meant. One student said that box is what the band sounds like and the right picture is what the band is supposed to sound like. Brimmer elaborated by saying that the pyramid shows that the bass sounds should be the loudest and the highest sounds should be softer. The box showed that all instruments are trying to be as loud as the bass and “that is what we call out of control.”
He explained that the trumpets and flutes are trying to play just as loud as the low winds, causing the bass instruments to try to be louder because they know they are supposed to be the loudest voice. This creates a situation where everyone tries to play louder than the rest of the group, resulting in “a sound that is not good for us.” He told the band that the audience appreciates sounds that are under control and that it is not just a thing for when they play scales, but an all the time thing.

8th-Grade Band

Although notes and rhythms continued to be an issue for the 8th-grade band, Brimmer emphasized ensemble and balance issues, music theory, and musical independence. Musical independence was discussed six times, music theory was discussed seven times, and ensemble issues were discussed 11 times. Because his teaching of ensemble and balance issues was consistent with what I had seen in previous observations of the 8th-grade band, specific examples are not reported here.

When the band rehearsed Songs of Scotland, style was not uniformly performed. After the introduction, Brimmer told the class that “the opening would be easier to perform in the correct style if we knew what song the introduction was based on.” He led the band through a performance trial of the next section in the piece and as before, the students did not play with a unified style. He told them that knowing the origin of the new melody would help the group understand the style. When one student asked “what songs are these?”, he challenged the class to research the piece and find out. He directed the students to research the Scottish songs the piece was based on by visiting the publisher’s website, performing internet searches, and visiting the library. He referred to the research as doing the “guide to musicality” assignment without a grade. He stressed that knowing about the style and culture of a piece will help them accurately
perform the music. Students were encouraged to improve their performance through musical independence because he challenged them to find information on their own by saying, “look it up because you want to be better musicians.”

Brimmer showed the relationship between music theory and science during a B-flat chromatic scale warm-up when the trombones and trumpets experienced difficulty remembering the slide positions and fingerings for each note. Brimmer informed the trombones that the slide position pattern was in descending numerical order: 1-7-6-5-4-3-2-1-5-4-3-2-1. He told them that due to the laws of physics, shortening the tubing and the distance that the air has to travel raises the pitch. If they can remember the basics of lower and longer, and higher and shorter, they will be able to remember slide positions with ease. He continued by saying that the trumpet works similarly because pressing valves changes the amount of tubing that the air has to travel through. Remembering which valve combinations are tied to the various parts of the instrument will help them know which fingerings to use as they play higher and lower.

*Week Three*

*Fourth Period 6th-Grade Band*

My third week of observation was the final full week of rehearsals before the Lake Middle School band concert. Most teaching moments consisted of ensemble or balance issues, statements encouraging musical independence, and the transfer of knowledge from one context to another. Brimmer attempted to facilitate transfer six times, encourage musical independence seven times, and address ensemble or balance issues 12 times.

In the previous week, Brimmer took the Lake High School Band to New York City to participate in festivals and clinics. In one clinic, the band was taught by Dr. Peter Boonshaft of Hofstra University. Brimmer used many of the principles and techniques that Boonshaft shared
with the high school band to reinforce ensemble and balance issues in his 6th-grade band rehearsals.

One Boonshaft technique that Brimmer used was a breathing exercise. He asked the students to sit tall on the front half of the chair, with their backs away from the back of the chair, and to keep their feet flat on the floor. He told them to take a deep breath and hold it until he tells them to breathe in. As they held their breath, he said, “you are 30 feet underwater, swimming toward the top. If you breathe in you will fill your lungs with water and die. Now you are 20 feet away…10 feet…5 feet, almost there…zero, now breathe!” The room filled with a loud, full breathing sound that came from the band. He told them that they should have the same feeling after they play a full phrase on their instrument. In order to take a full breath and fill one’s lungs with air, one must empty all the air in one’s body. He asked them to strive to use up as much air as possible while they play.

Brimmer also indicated that he wanted the band to exhale before they played, so the breath before their first note would be full and deep. He showed them an outward-from-body gesture that he would make with his open hand to indicate breathing out just before he gave them the downbeat of any performance trial. Throughout the rest of the week, he gave this same gesture before the band played warm-ups and performance trials of repertoire.

While rehearsing *Music of the Night*, Brimmer introduced the band to the concept of pyramid ensemble balance. He started by telling them that he remembered from earlier in the year that several students told him that, when they listen to music at home, they like to adjust the stereo so that the bass is higher and the treble is lower. He said that bands do the same thing to create a full, deep sound. He drew the following pyramid on the board:
Brimmer told the band that this is a visual representation of how loud the instruments in the band should play. He said that it was invented by Francis W. MacBeth, an important music educator, to show individuals how the instruments of the band should balance. He explained the diagram by saying that while there are many other instruments in a standard concert band, this picture best represents their band. The trombone, being the lowest sounding instrument in their band, needs to be the loudest sound, and all other instruments need to fit their sound into the sound of the bass. He asked the students to think about where they fit into this “pyramid balance” as they played. After the band played a tutti section of the music that was not well balanced, he drew the following picture next to the pyramid:

He said that the new picture represented the balance he heard from the band; the trumpets were playing louder than the trombones, the saxophones matched the trumpets, and the clarinets were softer than the flutes. He instructed the band to play again, and turn the balance of the group from this shape, into the pyramid he originally drew. He continued to emphasize this throughout the week.
Brimmer fostered musical independence in his students by encouraging them to perform “featured songs.” Participating students learned songs on their own so they could perform them at the upcoming band concert. Some students formed small ensembles while others decided to play solos. The students chose to perform popular songs, movie themes, tunes from Broadway musicals, and patriotic songs. Brimmer dedicated two full rehearsals to assisting participating students. Over half of the band volunteered to play “featured songs” at the concert. Students who chose not to perform were asked to work on homework silently during rehearsal time.

Eighth Period 6th-Grade Band

Phrasing, musical independence, and ensemble or balance issues dominated the teaching moments during my third week of observation. Phrasing was discussed four times, musical independence was discussed ten times, and ensemble or balance was discussed 14 times. Brimmer continued to use techniques gleaned from the high school band’s clinic with Dr. Boonshaft, as he did in the fourth period class. He also dedicated two full rehearsals to eighth period students who volunteered to participate in “featured songs.”

At the beginning of an F concert scale warm-up, Brimmer discussed the importance of posture when working to make the best sound one can. He told the band that one way Boonshaft reinforces posture during rehearsals is by using non-verbal gestures. Boonshaft has gestures for the two most important parts of good posture, one being to keep one’s feet flat on the floor, and the other being to keep one’s back away from the back of the chair. Brimmer said that he would stomp both feet on the podium to signify having both feet on the floor and he would pat his back to remind them to keep their back away from the chair. As he raised his arms to lead the band through the F concert scale, he stomped both feet and patted his own back. The band immediately straightened their bodies, moved their backs away from the backs of the chairs, and
placed both of their feet on the floor. When the band finished playing, he complimented the students for performing with a beautiful tone. He told them that their excellent posture made the beautiful tone possible. He continued to use Boonshaft’s non-verbal gestures before full runs of their repertoire throughout the rest of the week.

As the band rehearsed *Music of the Night*, Brimmer discussed the concept of phrasing as it relates to playing as an ensemble. During a run-through of the piece, he heard several members of the band take breaths in the middle of phrases. The clarinets had been phrasing well throughout the rehearsal, so he asked them to play for eight measures to serve as an example for the band. When the clarinets finished, he told the flutes and saxophones to hold out the middle of their phrases just like the clarinets did. He led the flutes and saxophones through an eight measure excerpt, but several students still took breaths where they were not supposed to. He informed them that he heard long notes being “cheated,” as students were dropping out early to take in air, which caused noticeable holes in their ensemble sound. He asked the students to take bigger breaths so they can sustain those notes as beautifully as the clarinets. If they needed to breathe sooner, he told them to take a quick, unnoticeable breath when they were not near a bar line. He related this to stopping at a gas station and putting a few gallons in one’s gas tank to hold them over until they could get to a cheaper gas station and fill the entire tank.

*7th-Grade Band*

Much of my third week of observation during 7th-grade band was made up of rehearsals of the Henry Fillmore march, *Lassus Trombone*. Brimmer had spent several rehearsals working out technical issues with several sections of the band but progress was slow. Students not working out individual part problems and having behavior issues in class hindered his efforts. He kept class fast paced and focused on fixing technical errors in order to get as much work done as
possible before the concert. He dedicated small portions of each rehearsal to polishing the other pieces they were going to play on their concert. During that time, he introduced Boonshaft methods and reinforced concepts such as musical independence, and balance and playing as an ensemble. When rehearsing *Lassus Trombone*, he asked the students to transfer the above concepts from other songs into their rehearsal. His teaching was consistent with previous examples, so specific teaching moments are not reported here.

8th-Grade Band

During my third week of observation, Brimmer focused on musical independence, style, and ensemble and balance issues more than he had been able to in previous weeks. Musical independence was emphasized in 10 teaching moments, style was emphasized in 13 teaching moments, and ensemble or balance issues were emphasized in 20 teaching moments. He continued to incorporate Boonshaft techniques regarding posture and breathing in the 8th-grade band as he did in the 6th and 7th-grade bands.

While rehearsing *Tale of the Comet*, Brimmer worked on stylistic elements such as accents and marcatos. He told the students to exaggerate the marcato style to add excitement to the music and contrast previous styles. He used the analogy that notes without style or excitement are like empty taco shells. Tacos are delicious because of the combination of meat, cheese, hot sauce, lettuce, and tomatoes. Accents, marcatos, and staccatos add spice to the music. He had trouble maintaining the ensemble’s focus during several minutes of rehearsal, so he stopped rehearsing the band and said that “we have one week to prepare four songs that are not ready. If you want to give the audience four taco shells, four songs with no life, and notes that are just thrown together we can do that.” He continued pushing the ensemble to be precise in terms of style and balance throughout the rest of the week.
Responses to questions one through four are my paraphrases of Brimmer’s comments during our reflective discussion. Verbatim responses of his comments are presented in Appendix F.

1. Based on what I noticed in class, such as you asking the sixth graders about their accuracy of style and phrasing, what is the role of self-assessment in your middle school bands?

   Developing self-assessment skills in students makes them more aware of their own performance so the teacher does not need to take class time to make simple adjustments. Brimmer starts teaching this skill in beginning band by allowing the students to voice their opinions, as individuals or as a collective, about the band’s performance. Encouraging the students to think about how well they played and tell the rest of the band is the first step to fostering an on-going self-assessment process that will speed up learning at the high school level.

2. During 6th grade band, you played an original recording of “Music of the Night”, which is one of the pieces they are rehearsing. What do you hope your students gained from that experience and what are some other instances where you have done this?

   Brimmer wanted the students to hear the tempo of the original version of the song. While the tempo of the sung Broadway version is inappropriate due to the frequent use of rubato for a beginning band arrangement, he wanted the band to hear the original context. He planned to return to the recording after a couple of weeks so his students could listen to the shapes of the phrases and transfer some of the musical ideas from the recording to their own performance. For the 7th and 8th-grade bands, he records the high school band playing the 7th and 8th-grade literature and plays it for them. He uses it to demonstrate what they should aim for in terms of
balance, style, phrasing, and dynamics. He feels that using the high school band as a reference makes the listening experience closer to home. If the middle school students listen to their friends and relatives in the high school band play well, they will see that a good performance is an attainable goal for the average band student. Periodically, he records the 7th and 8th-grade bands as they rehearse their literature so he can play the recordings for the students and get them to listen critically.

3. I noticed that you have several 7th and 8th-grade students working on solos or participating in ensembles. Why is chamber music important for middle school students?

Participating in an ensemble or playing a solo can serve as a confidence booster. Brimmer described a success story of a 7th-grade student of his who was sitting fourth chair and lacked confidence. He encouraged her to work on a solo he had chosen for her for solo and ensemble contest. She practiced her music at home, and he praised her for making noticeable improvements. He said that she came to class with a positive attitude and performed her parts remarkably better because of the confidence she gained. Playing in an ensemble requires students to be musically independent because they are typically the only person responsible for carrying a part. He believes that getting students to play in ensembles encourages them to practice more than they typically would because they have to be capable of playing a part on their own.

4. I noticed that you use large group adjudicated events as a primary motivator for musicality in your bands. What are the benefits to this, and are there any cons?

Brimmer feels that the best way to determine how good of a musician someone is, one must be able to compare oneself to a large pool of musicians. He said that parents will clap for their students whether they performed well or not because they love and support their children. The motivation is, how do you get strangers to clap for you? If you want to be a good musician,
you have to be able to do more than impress your parents. The only con to using competition as a motivator is when students become more concerned with the results than the process. Making improvements, reaching goals, and learning are more important than putting on a good performance at any cost.

Week Two

Responses to questions one through six are direct quotes from reflective comments he sent me via e-mail.

1. Which method books do you use with each of your bands and why did you choose them?

   This year I began to use the Measure of Success book with the beginning (6th grade) band. I chose it because of several factors. First, it has built-in assignments/assessments for composing, arranging, music terms and symbols, and music history. I knew these were areas that I did not address as well as I would like to with the previous method book that I used, and having them in the book makes it easier for the students. I also liked that the percussion book is comprehensive, including all of the percussion instruments as opposed to a separate book for mallet players and drummers. I continue to use Essential Elements 2000 (EE 2000), books 2 and 3, with the 7th and 8th grade, but primarily as sight reading exercises and supplemental material. The EE 2000 includes some historical material, but it was more challenging to get the students engaged in those things as there were no assignments other than those I created.

2. To what extent do you use each book?

   With the 6th grade band, the lesson book is the primary source of material for the first three quarters of the year. At that point we move on to our concert music as the primary learning material until the spring concert. After the concert we still have a couple of weeks of school
during which we finish the first book and, if time allows, begin practicing sight reading from EE 2000, book 2. With the 7th and 8th grade bands, the lesson books provide a refresher at the beginning of the year, getting used to playing with a group, getting chops back in shape, reviewing scales and rudiments, etc. After a few weeks, they want to move on to more challenging material - longer songs, band arrangements as opposed to unison playing, etc. For the bulk of the year, these two grades rehearse band arrangements, some of which will be used for their concerts. All of the music chosen for these groups is selected based on the skills the students need to develop, extending their range, improving reading skills, and for the variety of styles they represent. After the spring concert the 7th grade goes back to the EE 2000 books for sight reading practice and a few "new" things like new notes, alternate fingerings, new scales, etc. The 8th grade begins to sight read music they will use the following year for marching band.

3. *Earlier in the week you mentioned that the 6th grade will be doing featured songs at the concert. Can you talk more about this?*

For the first concert in December, I have each instrument group in the 6th grade choose a song that they will play to “feature” their instrument. For the spring concert I allow them to choose songs and who plays in each group with only a few restrictions from me. This allows them to play with their friends who play other instruments, and hopefully leads them to better learn how to work as a team in a small ensemble. We get quite a mix of musical styles and pretty interesting instrumentation at times, but the students enjoy it. The 7th and 8th grade students also are encouraged to play “feature” songs at the concert, and some do, but the primary emphasis is to get them to play in small ensembles to hone their individual skills.
This all carries over into solo and ensemble adjudication which doesn't seem so scary since they've already done something very similar.

4. *Quite often you use analogies to assist in your teaching moments. When did that become part of your teaching method and how do you think it has affected your students?*

I can't remember a time when I didn't teach with analogies. I don't remember anyone telling me that I should, but the students seem to like “story time” as they have called it, and its proven to be very effective. About half way through my career, I read somewhere that teaching with analogies was a great way to get kids to connect something they were familiar with to the new thing they were trying to learn. Who doesn't know the difference between walking and running by the time they're in middle school? Connecting that to Andante and Allegro just seemed so obvious to me. I use a lot of sports analogies because most kids are familiar with that, but I also try to include visual art (colors of paint compared to colors of sound), dance (mostly for performance style), literature (climax, denouement), and anything else I can think of that they can relate to.

5. *You mentioned the concept of “team” several times in each of your rehearsals. What does it mean for a band to be a team and why is it important for your students to learn that in beginning band?*

Teams are successful when everyone on the team puts the group goals ahead of their individual desires. We want every student to be successful in band, and the best way to do that is if they take responsibility for each other’s education. So many times in my career I've watched a student who liked band, but wasn't very good at playing their instrument, disappear into the background or quit. Some students are just too shy to ask for help when they don't understand, and when you teach such large classes, it is hard to always know who
"gets it" and who doesn't. These kids can play very softly, or not at all, and the teacher might not notice that they don't know what to do until the student is so far behind they don't feel like they'll ever catch up. If the student sitting next to them notices the problem, they can get help when they need it. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and the band is judged, not as individuals, but as a group. In order for our “chain” to be strong, every link has to be strong. If I can convince them of this in the first year of band, it makes it much easier for them to continue this peer help in 7th-grade, 8th-grade, and high school bands. It also helps those who are strong players to gain skills in leadership that are necessary to make the band run smoother in high school. They become section leaders, squad leaders, and officers knowing the expectations and how to meet them.

6. Considering the 8th grade’s issues with learning their individual parts and your 8th period 6th-grade band being ahead of the 4th period group, does an ensemble’s playing ability affect how you teach them? If so, how and why?

Unfortunately with some groups I can't do as much comprehensive musicianship as I like. Sometimes it has to do with behavioral problems. When I have a group that is more chatty, I have to keep them playing. My stories have to be fewer and much shorter. That's just basic classroom management. Sometimes a group just has a large number of students who either aren't trying or just don't get it as fast as the others. They need a lot more repetition in order to achieve even at a basic level. When there is an impending performance, the audience wants the band to play well and they don't care how it happens. Sometimes I have to force myself to just teach the songs so the band can make it past that milestone. When I have a group that is more advanced I can go into a lot more depth. I compare this problem to what is happening with the testing craze in our country. Many teachers are so concerned whether the
students can pass the standardized test that they have to cut back on the teaching methods that bring about real learning. The difference is that my teaching style can adapt to the students in the group, while many teachers of the “tested” subjects feel that they have to do it with every class.

_Week Three_

Responses to questions one through four are my paraphrases of Brimmer’s comments during our reflective discussion. Verbatim responses of his comments are presented in Appendix F.

1. Based on asking the 7th-grade trombone players how much they want to play “Lassus Trombone,” and asking your students for their opinion of music you are sight reading, how much do you value student input and what is its role in your comprehensive teaching?

Brimmer believes that the most important part of asking for student input is getting them to think. He asks students general questions about their musical opinions when they are in sixth grade, and gives directed questions to students in seventh and eighth grade because they are more able to understand several different viewpoints. While he listens to what they have to say and encourages dialogue about their thoughts on the music they play, he usually does not let student opinion change his mind about his decisions for them.

2. Can you think of any times in the past two or three years that you allowed student suggestions or opinions to help decide the direction of your class?

One way Brimmer lets student opinion influence his teaching concerns programming. During the sight-reading process, he chooses an overall theme, such as learning about overture style, and then picks out a few pieces for the bands to read. As they read each piece, he asks the students to tell him their impressions of the piece and whether or not they like the piece’s melody
or style. The pieces that the students like the most are usually the ones he will choose. For example, the high school band is working on String of Pearls because one of his students has been asking to play more jazz.

Another way Brimmer lets student opinion steer the class is method of study. He mentioned that for several years he had the bands listen to recordings of themselves and evaluate their performances using a rubric similar to the Ohio Music Education Association’s comment sheets. The goal was for students to think critically about the performance and, over time, to use this process to determine what a quality performance is in daily life. He noticed that in recent years the students no longer found this method of analyzing music to be interesting and that class discussions were growing stale. He stopped using that assignment and now uses the “guide to musicality” because he wanted to give the students a new perspective on how to think critically about music.

3. Can you give me some specifics about the process you use when choosing repertoire for your bands to perform?

Brimmer indicated that there are many things to consider when choosing repertoire, especially between grade levels. In 6th-grade music, he looks for block scoring, unisons, and simple harmonies to help students gain confidence from playing with others who are doing the same thing. In 7th-grade music, he chooses music that allows all instruments to have challenging and interesting parts. He also looks for music that contains some independent parts. While he usually will still choose music that has the whole band playing for a majority of the piece, accompaniments and harmonies are more complex than they were in the 6th-grade music. Extended rests, thin scoring, and extended ranges are the biggest difference between music he
chooses for the 7th and 8th grade bands. He also favors marches because they are indicative of the American band culture, and he feels it is something the students should be exposed to.

4. Do you plan concerts with specific learning goals in mind?

According to Brimmer, programming concerts with learning goals in mind is part of what makes programming challenging. He explained that he chose music for his 8th-grade band that would help them develop technique, specifically, hearing and playing the correct partials. He chose music with unison baselines because his low brass had the most difficulty finding the right partials on their own. The unison baseline helped them develop confidence because they could use one another as a point of reference for finding their parts. His 7th-grade band does not have technical difficulties like the 8th-grade band, so he chose music that required them to be more musically independent. One of their pieces, titled Echoes of the Civil War, starts with several exposed chamber passages. He wanted to challenge the band by making them count extended rests and match styles as the melody is passed from section to section.

Artifacts

The following section is a description of the artifacts I collected during my three weeks of observation, specifically method books, quizzes and tests, major projects, performance assessment rubrics, and concert programs. Appendix G consists of all artifacts, except for complete copies of method books.

Brimmer uses Measures of Success, Book 1 (2010), with his 6th-grade band. The book is organized into chapters called “Opuses,” with each “opus” containing progressive exercises and lessons in performance, music history, music theory, conducting, and composition or arranging. Brimmer has his students complete most of the written exercises as classwork or homework and assigns performance exercises at the end of the each “opus” as playing assessments. He uses the
performance assessment rubric from the *Measures of Success* resource CD to determine grades during playing assessments (see Appendix G).

When Brimmer conducts audio recorded playing assessments with his 7th-grade and 8th-grade students, he uses a playing assessment rubric that addresses the following: (a) tone quality and intonation, (b) note and rhythmic accuracy, (c) facility and precision, (d) phrasing, (e) articulation, (f) dynamics, and (g) style and expression. The assessment is assigned a score on a 100 point scale.

I also acquired terms quizzes that Brimmer gives to his 7th and 8th grade students. The quizzes contain questions that ask students to define musical terms concerning style or expression, answer theory questions, or explain musical concepts. The format of the quiz is the same as the one used for the 7th and 8th grade bands; however, the 8th-grade quiz contains more questions than the 7th-grade quiz.

Finally, I collected the guide to musicality assignment, which is another example of Brimmer’s use of comprehensive musicianship. He gives this assignment once per concert cycle to his 8th-grade band so his students learn more about their performance literature than how to perform musical tasks. The assignment requires students to complete two sections. Section one concerns background information on the composer and the work. Section two addresses interpretive matters in the work and asks students to identify musical terms found in the piece, describe the mood of the work, summarize program notes, and address the appropriate styles with which the piece should be played.

**Student Survey**

During my final visit to Lake Middle School, I distributed a survey consisting of four questions to assenting band students to determine their attitudes regarding what Brimmer
teaches. Twenty-nine sixth graders, 20 seventh graders, and 21 eighth graders participated in the survey \((N = 70)\). Question one asked students to indicate, using a semantic differential scale \((1 =\) Dislike, \(5 =\) Like\), how much they enjoyed learning about various aspects of music. Music history had the lowest overall means \((2.64)\), while musical “affect” had the highest overall mean \((3.98)\) (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Students’ Preferences for Musical Aspects Taught in Class, by Grade Level \((N = 70)\)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical Aspects</th>
<th>6th Grade Mean ((n = 29))</th>
<th>7th Grade Mean ((n = 20))</th>
<th>8th Grade Mean ((n = 21))</th>
<th>Overall Mean ((N = 70))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When the piece was written, and what happened in the world at that time.</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scales and harmonies used, counting rhythms.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about how the music sounds when it is played, quality of performance heard, etc.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the music makes you feel when you hear it, the mood or story the music is trying to convey.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating melodies or harmonies, either original or based on the music you are playing.</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning how to play the notes and rhythms of the music, performing musical tasks such as dynamics and style.</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Grade and overall means are from responses to a semantic differential scale in which 1 = Dislike and 5 = Like.

Question two asked students to indicate if they believed that learning about the aspects of music that are presented in Table 1 helped them become better musicians than if they learned only how to play notes and rhythms. Students could respond with Yes or No. Scales and harmonies used, and counting rhythms had the highest percentage of Yes responses (94.3%), while music history (52.6%) had the lowest percentage (see Table 2).

Table 2

Percentage of Students Who Feel That Learning About Five Musical Aspects Helps Them Become Better Musicians, by Grade Level (N = 70)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical Aspects</th>
<th>6th Grade (n = 29)</th>
<th>7th Grade (n = 20)</th>
<th>8th Grade (n = 21)</th>
<th>Overall (N = 70)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When the piece was written, and what happened in the world at that time.</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scales and harmonies used, counting rhythms.</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about how the music sounds when it is played, quality of performance heard, etc.</td>
<td>89.6%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>88.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the music makes you feel when you hear it, the mood or story the music is trying to convey.</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating melodies or harmonies, either original or based on the music you are playing.</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentage values indicate percentage of students who answered Yes to question two.
Question three asked students how often they offer comments in class. Students could respond with Never, Sometimes, or Always. Twenty-six percent of seventh graders responded Never, followed by eighth graders (19%) and sixth graders (17.2%) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Students by Grade Who Never, Sometimes, or Always Offer Comments About How the Class Could Better Perform the Music.

Question four asked students how much they enjoyed the opportunity to offer comments in class. They could respond with Do Not Enjoy, Somewhat Enjoy, or Really Enjoy. The 8th-grade band had more students (42.8%) respond with Really Enjoy, than the other two bands (see Figure 2).
Figure 2. Students’ Level of Enjoyment for the Opportunity to Offer Comments in Class.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Chapter five is organized into five sections: (a) interviews and weekly reflective discussions, (b) instructional themes, (c) student survey, (d) implications for music education, and (e) suggestions for further research. As in previous chapters, the term *teaching moment* refers to instances in which Brimmer discusses in-depth musical concepts in addition to basic performance directives. Some references to pieces of music that were rehearsed by the 6th-grade bands do not cite specific composers. Those pieces were taken from *Measures of Success, book I* (Sheldon, D., Balmages, Loest, & Sheldon, R., 2010).

Interviews and End-Of-Week Reflective Discussions

The purpose of the entrance interview was to introduce myself to Brimmer’s use of comprehensive musicianship so I would know what to expect during my observations. The purpose of the exit interview was to collect any information regarding his teaching that I did not collect in the entrance interview and to finalize my director profile. The weekly reflective discussions were conversations between Brimmer and me in which I asked questions concerning events I witnessed during my observations.

During the entrance interview, Brimmer defined comprehensive musicianship as “teaching to the state standards in any type of music class.” He continued by saying that in Ohio, the state standards are very similar to the National Standards for Music Education. One of the reasons I chose him as the subject of this study is that his definition of comprehensive musicianship reflected what I found in my own research. For example, Austin (1998) stated that “fundamentally, the National Standards for Music Education may be viewed as a "repackaging" of comprehensive musicianship principles” (p. 25).
When I asked Brimmer why it is important to teach middle school students comprehensively, he said that he wanted his students to understand why composers write in the manner that they do and how to be musically independent and make intelligent musical decisions. His answer corroborates the thoughts of Labuta (1997) who said comprehensive musicianship is “theory applied to practice; it is knowledge and skill applied to practical music making” (p. 6). Austin (1998) referred to comprehensive musicianship as “performance with understanding” (p. 25). In addition, he said that teaching his middle school students to be musically independent teaches them to be intelligent consumers of music.

When I asked Brimmer during the exit interview how he hopes his students will have changed musically and as human beings after having him as a teacher, he said that he hopes that by studying the “why” behind compositions, students will gain a stronger appreciation for music than if they only played songs. Furthermore, he told me that “if students can understand the effort it takes to produce various types of musical performances, even if they do not enjoy the music itself, they will be strong consumers of music.” This answer further corroborates Labuta (1997) who said that teaching students to appreciate music as an art and as a part of our culture results in the creation of a music appreciation course for band (p. 6).

Another question I asked Brimmer during the exit interview was what methods of assessment he used and if he preferred one method more than others. He said that he preferred using informal assessment in real-time that allows him to provide instant feedback to the students based upon what he sees and hears from them as they perform. He also said he likes using class discussions with his students because it requires them to explain concepts to him and the rest of the class, as well as give them the opportunity to make musical decisions. Duke (2010) stated that these types of assessments should be a part of every class so that the students have many
opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and achieve mastery of the material through practice and application (p. 61). Brimmer demonstrated a clear understanding of the assessment process by giving his students many chances to perform in class for feedback and by having discussions often. It is likely that he understands his students’ progress better than teachers who use only lectures and tests as instructional devices.

In the exit interview, I asked Brimmer about his experience with student teachers and how he hoped to have influenced them after they had him as their cooperating teacher. It was surprising that the first answer he gave was that he worked to help student teachers with their classroom management skills because most of his student teachers already demonstrated excellent musicianship. He pointed out that many teacher education programs teach students to know the content matter and how to write lessons; however, there is little opportunity for students to practice classroom management techniques in realistic situations outside of student teaching, because college classmates have a different maturity level than middle school or high school students. Even when teacher education programs were reformed in the late 1960s in the name of comprehensive musicianship, as stated by Sindberg (2009), the reforms focused on additional training in music history and theory (p. 27). The teaching of effective classroom management skills should not be assigned only to cooperating teachers during student teaching, but should be a regular focus of college teacher education programs.

During my observations I noticed that Brimmer spent several rehearsals working with small chamber groups. In the 6th-grade band, he encouraged students to independently form small ensembles and perform short “featured songs” at the spring concert. Seventh and eighth grade band students were encouraged to perform at the OMEA District I solo and ensemble festival. During the reflective discussion at the end of week one, he explained that he urges
students to perform in chamber settings because it serves as a confidence booster and most importantly, encourages musical independence in his students. Throughout the years, music educators have written about the importance of chamber music to students in large ensembles. Regelski (1969) said that large ensemble instruction was not enough to achieve musical understanding in students. He stated that to foster musical independence in students, small ensemble experiences must be available to all students in large performance groups (p. 81). Battisti (1989) also believed in the importance of chamber music to the music education of band students and said that not only can students learn performance skills, but they can also be exposed to a wide variety of good literature that offers valuable opportunities for learning music history and theory (p. 25). Brimmer’s work to encourage his students to perform music in small groups because of the benefits it has on their musical understanding is another reason why he is an effective teacher.

Instructional Themes

To organize my rehearsal observation notes, I categorized tallied teaching moments into the following four instructional themes: (a) music theory, (b) performance skills, (c) musical independence, and (d) music’s relationship to other aspects of life. Subthemes were identified under each theme, except for music theory. Teaching moments in which Brimmer taught scales, key signatures, or harmony were all labeled as music theory. Style, melody and phrasing, ensemble and balance, and transfer are subthemes of performance skills. The musical independence theme contains teaching moments that included the use of peer assessment among the students, Brimmer’s “team” concept, and instructional statements that required students to think about, recall, and perform musical concepts without being prompted by the teacher. Music history, while not included in enough teaching moments to be considered a major instructional
theme, was used to reinforce other themes. Specific teaching moments that included music history and its impact on other instructional themes are discussed after the four main themes. Tallies from teaching moments under each theme were analyzed to see which subthemes were most common in Brimmer’s teaching.

Results of the analysis showed that how much a theme or subtheme was emphasized varied from week to week and from band to band. Reasons for this variance were the performance ability of each band and student behavior issues. Bands that demonstrated understanding of repertoire through performance received more rehearsals containing comprehensive topics such as music theory or connections to other disciplines than groups that struggled with their repertoire. Upon noticing this trend during weeks one and two, I asked Brimmer if an ensemble’s playing ability affects how he teaches and if so, how and why. He said that several factors including performance ability, behavioral issues, and performance deadlines affect how he teaches. If a group struggles to learn the notes and rhythms of a piece, he spends more time drilling them on those issues than on teaching comprehensive ideas. Groups that have behavior problems require strict classroom management, which means that the group must be kept playing their instruments to avoid disruptions, leaving him little time for discussion or analysis. If students do not learn music as planned or their behavior is an issue, the deadline of an impending concert also influences how Brimmer teaches. In his week two interview, he said that, “the audience wants the band to play well and they don't care how it happens. Sometimes I have to force myself to just teach the songs so the band can make it past that milestone.”

Losing time for comprehensive musicianship lessons because of performance demands and pressure from parents is a common problem among school band directors. When Brame (2011) surveyed band directors in Wisconsin and Illinois concerning their acceptance and use of
comprehensive musicianship, he found that performance demands and pressure from parents often inhibit the directors from teaching comprehensively (p. vii). Brimmer demonstrated commitment to comprehensive teaching because he included as many comprehensive moments as possible in each of his lessons, even when he was forced to spend the majority of rehearsal time fixing students performance errors. This occurred often in rehearsals with the fourth period 6th-grade band and the 8th-grade band.

**Music Theory**

Music theory instruction is a major theme in Brimmer’s 6th-grade band. Theory instruction took place during 12 teaching moments with the fourth period 6th-grade band, and 25 times with the eighth period 6th-grade band. Hoffer (1983) suggested that band directors integrate music theory learning alongside pieces of music being rehearsed, “as much as reasonably possible” (p. 174). This is something that Brimmer strives to do, as demonstrated by the number of music theory teaching moments I observed during my three weeks of observation. As the 6th-grade band is the beginning band at Lake Middle School, it is the first class in which students must rely on their ability to read and understand musical notation. Ramsey (2001) said that learning to read musical notation is essential for beginning band students and that they must be able to identify the note and rest symbols for each clef. Therefore, Brimmer’s integrating music theory at the core of beginning band instruction is appropriate. During week two’s reflective discussion, Brimmer explained that he chose the *Measures of Success* method book because the issues of composing, arranging, musical terms, and symbols were well addressed and easily accessible for students. During the exit interview, he mentioned that pencil and paper theory assignments are one of the primary ways he assesses beginning band students as they develop their performance skills. He proves his commitment to comprehensive musicianship by teaching
basic theory and notation instruction immediately in his 6th-grade band and not waiting until the
students have all their fingerings memorized or can play through the first several pages of the
method book.

Brimmer regularly uses theory and notation assignments to relieve performance pressure from beginning instrumental students. In my experience as a middle school band instructor, I have noticed students become easily frustrated when they do not succeed or when they have difficulty becoming proficient on their instrument. For example, students become discouraged when they earn low scores on performance assessments. A student who works hard to improve on his or her instrument may not be worthy of an A on playing tests due to problems with tone or technique; however, they may have an excellent understanding of rhythm, theory, and notation, or possess listening or compositional skills. If teachers weigh their class too heavily on performance without considering other factors, good students who possess potential for success may leave a band program because they earn low performance marks that significantly lower their term grades. A student’s comprehensive understanding of music should be given strong consideration alongside performance skills.

In my observations, I noticed that Brimmer used the method book and performance literature to teach four scales to the fourth period 6th-grade band, including the F, Bb, Eb, and Ab concert scales. The eighth period 6th-grade band demonstrated proficiency when performing scales and literature quicker than the fourth period band, which gave him time to teach them the Bb chromatic and C minor scales. He taught the scales to the students using the circle of fourths so they could learn the scales in the order that flats are added. Lisk (2006) stated that teaching with the circle of fourths serves as a simple link between keys and provides teachers with many rehearsal opportunities for students to master musical fundamentals (p.20). He said that with the
scale knowledge provided by learning the circle of fourths, students will become sensitive to the “in-tuneness” of scales and will perform with better intonation (p.25). Duke (2010) said that students must build positive musical habits if they are to be successful and that positive musical habits come from “consistent, productive repetition over time” (p. 93). During rehearsals with his bands, Brimmer built student habit strength by reviewing the scales that the band had already learned by regularly rehearsing all scales, in the circle of fourths order, on a regular basis.

In addition to playing the scales, Brimmer led the class in a discussion about transposition each time the band learned a new scale. He used the discussion to assess the students’ understanding of the new scale’s relationship to their instrument, the concert pitch name of the note, and names of the notes the rest of the band plays by asking students to discuss among themselves and report their findings to the class. According to Willoughby (1990), one of the principles of comprehensive musicianship is students’ active involvement in applying musical concepts, rather than simply memorizing information in a passive learning environment (p. 39). Brimmer’s use of discussions demonstrated this because he kept his students engaged by having them explain musical ideas and concepts to the rest of the class. Having students explain ideas and concepts in their own words is an excellent way to keep them actively learning and to measure their understanding. If a student cannot clearly explain something aloud, they most likely do not understand it.

Brimmer demonstrated his use of comprehensive musicianship by using a spiral curriculum in his 7th and 8th-grade bands and building upon the music theory knowledge his students learned in 6th-grade band. According to Garafalo (1983), continually addressing concepts such as music theory adds continuity to the band program and ensures that a comprehensive approach is always being used (p.5). In his 7th-grade band, he introduced the
concept of minor scales through a piece of music they were preparing for their spring concert. The Michael Sweeney composition, *Aztalan: City of Mystery*, is written in the key of C minor, the relative minor of Eb major. Brimmer chose the piece because it allowed him to introduce the concept of minor scales using a key signature that was familiar to his students. After rehearsing the Eb major scale, he rehearsed the C minor scale by asking the band to play all the same notes as the Eb scale, but to begin on the 6th note of the Eb scale, C concert. In addition, he drew a diagram to serve as a road map and as a visual aid.

Brimmer’s teaching of minor scales in middle school is very beneficial to band students. While they may not be able to play major scales with six flats or sharps, they can understand and hear differences in mood and tonality. Rather than waste time with technical drill in accidental laden keys such as E major or Gb major that will not be in middle school level literature, he teaches students to hear and identify the mood of a piece through hearing and performing a combination of major and minor tonalities. This keeps the students engaged as they discern the mood or emotion that the composer is trying to convey through the music. During the exit interview, he said that studying the message the composers were trying to convey in the music helps students gain a stronger appreciation for music. The ability to perform major or minor keys enables students to perform a wider variety of literature and achieve a more effective musical performance than if they performed music in uncommon keys that are rarely used in middle school literature. Lisk (1991) said that a common problem among bands is that they can play only a limited set of major keys, such as F, Bb, Eb, and Ab. He believed that an ensemble’s goal should be to gain proficiency in both major and minor keys so that the most prominent band literature is accessible to the group (p. 28).
In the 8th-grade band, Brimmer continued theory instruction by introducing the band students to more keys from the circle of fourths, including Db major, C major, and the chromatic scale. As with his 6th-grade band, he led discussions with the class about the new notes in each scale and what their concert pitch and transposed names were. When teaching the chromatic scale, he played several examples on the piano, had the students construct chromatic scales on the board, and explained half-step and whole-step intervals. He logically built upon students’ prior knowledge not only by asking them to perform new scales, but also by having them assist him in constructing scales and identifying intervals. When the students learned a new scale, he had them figure out the new notes and write them on the board by constructing the scale using half-step and whole-step patterns. He effectively continued the spiral curriculum by having the students go beyond reading and identifying scales.

In his teaching of music theory, Brimmer sequenced instruction so previous knowledge is reinforced and built upon. He laid a foundation by teaching basic notation and reading skills at the start of 6th-grade band. He built upon this foundation by teaching major scales using the circle of fourths in sixth grade, adding major scales and introducing minor scales in seventh grade, and by learning additional major scales, the chromatic scale, and teaching scale construction in the eighth grade. His sequencing of instruction so lessons become more complex each year is in agreement with O’Toole (2003, p. 32) who said that lessons need to be sequenced so students are challenged and gain independence as lessons increase in complexity in accordance with Bloom’s Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain (1956).

Performance Skills

One of the reasons why Brimmer is an effective teacher is that when he teaches performance skills, he focuses on facilitating transfer in his students by making sure that
everything he teaches them is applicable to their performance literature. For example, when teaching a new scale in the circle of fourths, he frequently reminded students that, rather than learning a whole new scale, they are changing only one note from the previous scale that uses all the same notes as before, except for one. When he was teaching the Eb scale to his eighth period 6th-grade band, he explained to the class that the Eb scale uses all the same notes as the Bb scale, with one difference; the fourth note, which was natural in the Bb scale but is flat in the Eb scale. Just before leading them through a performance trial he reminded them to think of the alphabet and observe the accidentals in the key signature as they played. Following the successful trial, he immediately transitioned to rehearsing *Cossack Marching Song* and asked the class to look at the key signature and tell him what scale the piece is based upon. A student correctly answered, Eb. He told the class to remember that scale and key signature mean the same thing, and that they should remember all the notes they used in the Eb scale a moment ago and play them in this song. He instructed them to not play any note or push any buttons on their instrument that they did not previously use in the Eb scale. He facilitated transfer in his students in this instance because his warm-up directly reflected what was being taught in the literature, and it led to fewer key signature mistakes as the band rehearsed *Cossack Marching Song*. By telling the students that the piece they were playing was based upon the notes of the Eb scale, he showed them that scales have an important purpose and make the playing of songs easier. It may be inferred that if one has a deeper understanding of scales and key signatures, they will learn new songs with greater efficiency.

Brimmer continued to facilitate transfer in a similar rehearsal with his fourth period 6th-grade band by saying that “key signature and scale are two different ways of saying the same thing…scale equals song.” After the band played an Eb scale in thirds exercise from the method
book, he told his class that “just like professional baseball players use batting cages, musicians use scales; scales help us play songs.” This analogy showed the application and transfer of skills from batting practice and scale practice, to baseball games and musical performances.

It may be that students will make fewer key signature mistakes if they are shown a clear relationship between the scales they rehearse and the literature they are preparing. Asking students to play songs and scales, and to push certain buttons because the paper says to do so does not generate musical understanding in students. Student learning efficiency may increase if they learn why the Eb scale contains three flats and why the home note is Eb. I observed that the number of times Brimmer gave key signature reminders to his 6th-grade bands, regardless of the piece they were rehearsing, decreased after he had taught several lessons that demonstrated the key-song-scale relationship.

During a rehearsal with the 7th-grade band, Brimmer used a chorale in Eb to help his students prepare for their rehearsal of Mark Williams’s *Echoes of the Civil War*, a piece that is in Eb major. After a performance trial, he asked the class to tell him why he chose to rehearse the chorale as their warm-up. Students cited key signature, dynamics, and rhythms as possible reasons. He then told the class that the key signature and dynamic changes in the chorale are applicable to *Echoes of the Civil War*, as well as playing four measure phrases. He instructed the class to pay closer attention to these details, use the written dynamics to shape the phrases, and play complete phrases without breathing. After a few minutes of rehearsing and improvement from the students, Brimmer transitioned to a rehearsal of *Echoes* by saying, “thank you, now do those things in *Echoes of the Civil War.*” After hearing a key signature mistake, he reminded the band that the key signature of the warm-up chorale was the same as the song they were playing and, unless there was an accidental written in their part somewhere, they were not to play
anything that was outside of two pieces’ key signatures. He also referred back to the chorale’s phrasing and dynamic markings as similar passages arose in the music. He frequently compared the two pieces so the band could see the similarities and transfer what they did in one piece to the other. When the band played a section well and demonstrated transfer, he gave positive reinforcement by saying, “thank you for not making us fix what we learned.”

During my observations, there were several other instances in which Brimmer asked students to transfer knowledge from other pieces or exercises. He planned his lessons so that musical elements such as key signature, style, phrasing, and dynamics could be transferred from one portion of the lesson to another. While these elements were not the same in everything the students did, he worked to make sure something from each lesson could carry over into the next. Sindberg (2012) said that while some students may transfer knowledge on their own, teachers need to consistently show students the connections between different contexts and pieces of music (p. 50). Brimmer demonstrated this by showing students connections between each of their musical activities, rather than simply telling them how they are supposed to perform each time they played a new song.

Musical Independence

Brimmer’s use of transfer when teaching performance skills is closely related to his desire for students to be musically independent. During the entrance interview, he said that his goal is to give students the tools they need to understand and play music without his assistance, because students who are musically independent performers will be musically independent consumers. When rehearsing repertoire with his bands, he uses statements that require his students to recall information and make musical decisions with as little help from him as
possible. He frequently reminds his bands that being aware of what is happening musically around them and making independent musical decisions is crucial to the success of the band.

During a 6th-grade band rehearsal of *Cossack Marching Song*, Brimmer pointed out to the band that, unless he reminds them to use proper phrasing prior to a performance trial, they do not do it; however, when he tells them to play four measure phrases, they execute them correctly. He informed the students that if they want to give a quality performance and be successful as an ensemble, they must be able to perform musical tasks such as phrasing without being reminded. He told the band that taking time to tell them to do things they have already learned wastes rehearsal time that could be used to learn new things. He expected his students to be musically independent and remember what they have been previously taught. Since his students have had several lessons concerning proper phrasing, it is a reasonable expectation that they should be able to identify and play four measure phrases without being reminded to do so.

While rehearsing *Echoes of the Civil War* with the 7th-grade band, Brimmer heard the tempos fluctuate and several students miss entrance cues. He told the band that they needed to look up and watch him for cues, and not guess by trying to fit in with everyone else. Several times throughout the lesson he reminded the class that just pushing buttons on the instrument and hoping they play right notes is not enough; they must be watching, counting, listening, and adjusting their playing at all times so they can give the best performance possible. Next, he told the bass drum player to be a leader and not a follower. His saying that, rather than just saying to not slow down, was an instruction that told the student to be proactive and lead the band with his playing by trying to stay on top of the beat and not falling behind.

Brimmer worked to show his students why it is important to be musically independent during each of his lessons. Middle school band students are still young musicians with limited
attention spans. Since they are not fully mature and their performance experiences are limited, they may not be fully aware of the hard work that good high school, collegiate, and professional musicians have to do to create quality music. His emphasis on band members being proactive thinkers and participators is crucial if his middle school students are to become musically independent.

Another example of Brimmer’s working toward his students’ musical independence was when he rehearsed the C concert scale with the 8th-grade band. He stopped a performance trial to fix the band’s intonation on the note E natural. He told the class that the note is naturally sharp for flutes and trumpets and that they should listen around them and adjust their tuning if they notice that they are not blending. After two more performance trials and reminders about listening, blending, and adjusting, trumpet intonation did not improve. He reminded the students that he had already explained several times in other lessons that they must be aware of how their playing fits in with the rest of the section. He told the trumpets how to correct the problem and said that “just pushing buttons and blowing will not help; always listen and make changes.” He wanted his students to know that just making a sound and being a button pusher is not enough to help the band have a quality sound.

It is important to teach students that playing well requires more than just playing the right note. Playing well and creating a balanced, in tune, and quality sound demands an ongoing concentrated effort, and it is each individual’s responsibility to be critical of their own playing and ensure they are playing the best they can. Brimmer’s goal is to have students leave his program as intelligent consumers of music. Once students know what a quality sound is, and the effort it takes to create it, they may find it easier than other students to make informed decisions about what is good music.
The primary method Brimmer used to make students take responsibility of their own performance was emphasizing the importance of teamwork. He frequently told them that performing ensembles are teams, and are only as strong as their weakest player. An example of this occurred during an 8th-grade band rehearsal of Williams’s *Songs of Scotland*. During the rehearsal, some students played noticeably well while others struggled to play the correct notes and rhythms. After a short performance trial, Brimmer told the band that there were many performance problems including wrong notes, rhythms, and articulations. He said he could not tell which was worse because each student had a different problem and it seemed that many of them could not play their parts. After rehearsing an eight measure section of the music with the flutes, clarinets, saxophones, and trumpets several times with little success, he said that “some of us still don’t have it and your classmates don’t want to listen to us practice.” He told those students that it is not fair for the members of the team who learned their music at home to sit and wait for the people who are holding the team back by not putting in practice time to learn their parts. He reminded the band of this several times during the 8th-grade band rehearsals I observed.

While rehearsing the Bb and Eb scales with the fourth period 6th-grade band, Brimmer asked the students to raise their hands if they heard performance mistakes. After each performance trial, only a few students raised their hands to identify mistakes that had occurred while others sat with blank looks on their faces. When he noticed that many students were not raising their hands and there were still many errors in performance, he asked “who heard mistakes? If you didn’t, that means you were not paying attention to what is around you. You can’t focus on you; it’s all about team. Hear the group, not just you.”

In a subsequent rehearsal in which some students were still struggling with correct notes and rhythms, Brimmer instructed the class to fix their mistakes and “help your neighbors to get
it; that’s how we make a great band. We can’t be great if everyone doesn’t get it.” During the reflective discussion in week two, he said that some students who have trouble playing their instruments are too shy to ask for help and eventually the student will become discouraged and may want to leave band due to lack of success. He told me that he encourages all members of the band to help nearby peers who appear to have difficulty with their music, so there are no weak links in the chain that is the band. Finally, he mentioned that giving peer help trains stronger players to become section leaders and officers in the high school band.

Brimmer also fostered musical independence by having his students perform chamber music as he discussed during our reflective discussions. During rehearsals with his 7th and 8th-grade bands, he had students who participated in solo and ensemble festival speak to the class about their experiences. Several students expressed to the band that playing a solo or in an ensemble was fun, gave them more confidence as a player, and made them a stronger player overall. In our first reflective discussion, Brimmer said that he believes that playing in a small ensemble makes students musically independent because they are typically the only person responsible for carrying a part. Furthermore, he feels that students who play solos or in ensembles are more likely to practice more than usual because they have to be able to play a part on their own. He told me a story about a former student of his who moved to a higher chair in her section because she improved significantly due to her solo and ensemble practice.

Music’s Relationship to Other Aspects of Life

In the exit interview, Brimmer expressed that music programs need to attend to the needs of the whole student if the community is to see the need for music in schools. Showing students the connection between band, music, and other aspects of life is one of his strongest teaching skills, and this is exemplified through his teaching by analogy.
In several rehearsals, Brimmer used analogies to reinforce the importance of performance skills. While rehearsing Edmonson’s *Mount Vernon March* with the eighth period 6th-grade band, he related dynamics to the speed one drives a car. He told the band that he wanted the students to make a bigger difference between forte and mezzo-forte than what they had just performed. He explained that it is similar to the difference between driving 55 miles per hour (mph) and 45mph. While there is only a difference of 10mph, it is still very noticeable to the passengers and to drivers of other vehicles.

As he rehearsed *Whipsaw March* by Barry Kopetz with the 7th-grade band, several students performed the music one measure at a time by taking breaths at each barline. He used an analogy to correct this by saying “barlines are invisible to the audience; if the audience can hear barlines, you are doing it (phrasing) wrong.” After several more performance trials and little improvement, he used another analogy and told the students that performing short choppy one to two measure phrases is similar to how a third grader writes a sentence. He spoke several three or four word sentences and then told the students that seventh graders do not talk that way and are not to play music that way. He reminded them to connect the measures and perform a full musical idea as if they were speaking mature, complete sentences.

During my final week of observation, Brimmer led a rehearsal with the 8th-grade band that focused on musical nuance. After several unsatisfactory performance trials in which he asked the band to make greater differences in dynamics and exaggerate marcato and staccato articulations, he said to the group that marcatos and the like “add excitement, or else the notes are like a taco with an empty shell; meat, cheese, hot sauce, lettuce and tomato add flavor and spice.” He told them to add life to the music by properly executing the various dynamics and articulations written in the music. After a few more performance trials, the band became talkative
and unfocused, and made little improvement on the dynamics and articulations. Brimmer stopped rehearsal and showed the importance behind his analogy by saying “we have one week to prepare four songs that are not ready. If you want to give the audience four empty taco shells, four songs with no life and are just notes thrown together, we can do that.”

In each of his analogies, Brimmer shows real life situations that have noticeable implications. The analogy he used with the 6th-grade band showed the students that the difference between 55 mph and 45 mph is noticeable, and can result in speeding tickets, traffic problems, and varying travel times. Relating poor musical phrasing to the undesirable and immature sound of 3rd-grade level sentences demonstrated that playing only one or two measures and then taking a breath sounds strange and does not convey a complete musical thought. The taco shell analogy he used with the 8th-grade band showed that notes and rhythms without dynamics and proper articulation are uninteresting to listen to and are musically bland, similar to an empty taco shell with no meat or flavorful fillings. As most middle school students possess a limited understanding of musical detail, they do not realize the importance of musical nuances. Brimmer’s use of analogy when teaching musical concepts helps students understand this importance by connecting music to elements of life with which they are familiar. This relationship between music and life helps teach students a “why factor” that they can understand. It may be said that the use of analogy will make students musically independent faster than students who are told to fix problems on a case by case basis, because they have been given a “why factor” with which they can relate.

*Use of Music History*

Brimmer’s teaching of music history varied in depth. Rehearsals I observed included teaching moments in which he weaved music history facts into the lesson, taught style and
performance practice through the use of music history’s relationship to the music, and discussed a large comprehensive assignment that his 8th-grade band completed.

A main principle of comprehensive musicianship is to find ways to go beyond the notes and rhythms in rehearsal by weaving interesting facts or information concerning the music into teaching moments. According to Garofalo (1983), a band rehearsal should include short discussions and lectures that help students better understand musical concepts such as structure, history, and style (p.19). During a 7th-grade band rehearsal of Whipsaw March, Brimmer heard the percussion section slow down several times, which caused the rest of the band to drag the tempo. Instead of telling the percussionists to play faster, he told a story about John Philip Sousa. He said that Sousa, best known as the former director of the United States Marine Band and as the “march-king,” always put his best percussionist on the bass drum. He explained that Sousa believed that the bass drum part was the heartbeat of the band and was responsible for driving the band forward by maintaining a steady beat. He pointed out that Sousa’s belief is still true and that marches need to have a rock steady bass drummer. This explanation of the importance of the bass drum part showed the student that he and his part were crucial to the success of the ensemble and that Brimmer had confidence in his abilities by placing him on what Sousa felt was the most important percussion part. Brimmer did not need to remind the student to maintain a steady tempo throughout the rest of the rehearsal. Garafalo (1983) felt that stories such as these are helpful to students, especially when they are not “long-winded monologues” (p.19).

Brimmer used music history to teach style when he described the history of military marching bands in a 6th-grade band rehearsal of Mount Vernon March. He explained that marches were written for military bands to play while troops marched from one location to another. He continued by saying that the troops marched to the beat of the music, and when
bands played at a steady pace with crisp articulation the music would send a clear message to the troops that they should stay in time and march with purpose. He taught background information that gave his students a deeper understanding of marches so they would be able to create more effective performances now and in the future. This type of performance practice study was discussed by Labuta (1997) who said that performance practice study is appropriate for band rehearsals, is a practical approach for studying historical styles, and helps students achieve valid interpretations of the music they are playing (p. 112-114). Giving the students a “why” factor based on history and performance practice is far more meaningful than teacher directives concerning style every time the band plays a march.

During the second quarter of classes at Lake Middle School, Brimmer gave the 8th-grade band an assignment, called “The Guide to Musicality.” The assignment asked the students to research several aspects of a composition they were preparing for their concert. The students had to research biographical information about the composer and the genre of the piece, identify and define the musical terms used, discuss the use of phrasing, articulation, and dynamics throughout the work, and explain how the program notes and other sources of information can help achieve a strong performance. During my observations, he referred to this assignment several times during his rehearsals with the 8th-grade band.

While rehearsing Songs of Scotland, an arrangement of Scottish folk songs, the band was having difficulty playing with a uniform style. He told the class that knowing the song that the introduction was based on would help the group better understand the style they should use when performing. He made similar statements throughout the rehearsal whenever the band played a section of the music that introduced a new folk song that required a style change. When one student asked him what songs the piece was based on, he challenged the class to find this
information on their own by checking the publisher’s website, researching the composer, going to the library, and performing simple internet searches.

Brimmer’s “Guide to Musicality” is more than just an assignment; it is a way of thinking that students should apply to each piece they play so they can better understand how to perform the music and accurately represent the message the composer was trying to convey. The “Guide to Musicality” is similar to the unit studies described by Garafalo (1983), which are assignments that outline basic musical concepts such as melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics, and texture in the piece studied. Garafalo (1983) explained that the piece chosen as the unit study composition is the “primary instructional vehicle for teaching comprehensive musicianship in the curriculum” (p.5). Brimmer’s use of the “Guide to Musicality” during the second quarter and emphasis on its purpose during his rehearsals demonstrates his commitment to the students’ comprehensive and thorough musical understanding of a major study piece each concert cycle.

Student Survey

According to Sindberg (2012), comprehensive musicianship “is a mechanism for fostering a student-centered classroom” (p. 48). As such, I believe it is important to consider band students’ preferences in regards to what they are taught in class. In my experience as a middle school band director, I have observed that when students do not enjoy learning about something, they do not put forth the same level of effort as they do when they learn about something they do like; therefore, I found it appropriate to survey Brimmer’s band students regarding their attitudes concerning what is taught in class. I distributed the same survey, which consisted of four questions, to the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade bands. For the purpose of this discussion, the fourth period and eighth period 6th-grade bands are considered one combined 6th-grade band.
Question one asked students to indicate, using a semantic differential scale (Dislike = 1, Like = 5), how much they enjoyed learning about various aspects of music. Surprisingly, the results showed that students preferred to spend class time learning how to play notes and rhythms rather than learning historical facts about music they are playing that may be interesting. Music history is the subject in which students find the least enjoyment, with the lowest overall mean (2.63). When asked if they enjoyed learning about music theory, learning about musical affect, composing and arranging, analyzing music, and learning their individual parts, overall means (3.50 to 4.0) indicated that they received moderate enjoyment from learning everything except for music history. I also found it interesting that the sixth graders’ mean (4.48) indicated that they enjoyed learning about how to play their individual parts more than any other aspect of music, and more than the other grades. It may be that since playing a musical instrument is new to sixth graders, they still consider learning how to play correct notes and rhythms a major achievement. The 8th-grade band’s mean (3.62) indicated that they enjoyed learning about notes and rhythms the least of the three bands. It may be that since the eighth graders are in their third year of playing their instruments, they no longer find learning about how to play correct notes and rhythms to be interesting.

Furthermore, the 8th-grade means (music history, 2.90; theory, 3.57; performance quality, 3.90; musical affect, 4.04; composition and arranging, 3.81) that indicated how much they enjoyed learning about comprehensive topics were noticeably higher than the other two groups’ means. It could be said that eighth grade students are more intellectually mature than sixth and seventh graders, because they are entering the formal operations stage of development as discussed by Piaget. According to Webb (1980), students age 11 and older who reach the formal operations stage are able to manipulate logical ideas, think abstractly and hypothesize (p. 94).
Therefore, they may receive more enjoyment from studying in-depth concepts such as music theory or aesthetics than from learning basic performance skills. It should be noted that while the 8th-grade means were higher than the other groups’ means, the 6th grade and 7th-grade bands both indicated that they received enjoyment from comprehensive learning.

Question two asked students to indicate if they believed that comprehensive learning helped them become better musicians more than if they only learned how to play correct notes and rhythms. Students could respond with Yes or No. Similar to question one, music history had the lowest percentage of students respond with Yes (52.6%); however, a greater percentage of sixth graders (65.5%) believed that music history helps them than the other two bands. Surprisingly, less than half of the 7th-grade band (40%) saw the worth of studying music history. In addition, the 7th-grade band (65%) had noticeably fewer students indicate that they believe musical affect helps them become better musicians; however, this percentage does indicate that the majority of seventh graders see the value in studying musical affect. Aside from less than half of the seventh graders indicating that studying music history is helpful, the majority of students in each class believe that learning comprehensively helps them become better musicians.

Questions three and four asked students how often they offer comments in class and how much they enjoy offering comments, respectively. In responding to question three, the 6th-grade band had the largest number of students (76%) indicate that they Sometimes volunteer to offer comments. It may be that since the sixth graders are new to instrumental music, they are more eager to participate in class discussions. The 7th-grade band had the largest percentage of students (26%) indicate that they Never offer comments in class, and in response to question four, the smallest percentage of students (15%) indicate that they Really Enjoy offering
comments. Overall, at least half of the seventh grade band students Sometimes offer comments and Somewhat enjoy doing it. It could be said that, since seventh grade is considered the middle grade in middle school, these students are just beginning to mature intellectually and their preferences are continually changing. Just as young students change hair styles and food preferences when they grow older, students’ intellectual desires may do the same thing. As shown in question four, the 8th-grade band had the largest percentage of students (42.8%) indicate they Really enjoy offering comments and the largest percentage (19%) indicate that they Do Not Enjoy offering comments.

It is clear that the band students at Lake Middle School enjoy comprehensive learning. Austin (1998) found that students “appear to enjoy the challenge and variety of comprehensive activities” (p. 30). Based upon the results of this study, I believe that comprehensive teaching should begin in beginning band and increase in depth as band students mature, because enjoyment in comprehensive learning increases as students grow older; however, it is crucial that band directors find a balance between comprehensive teaching and instructing students on how to play their instruments. Band directors must take care to not sacrifice student performance ability for comprehensive knowledge in the early stages of technical development, and vice versa, as students may musically mature faster if they are taught musical concepts alongside basic performance skills.

Implications for Music Education

While Brame (2011) found that the primary reason teachers do not use comprehensive musicianship is performance demands, Brimmer’s teaching of comprehensive musicianship kept performance at the center of his instruction. Cargill (1993) observed that teachers who strongly believe in comprehensive musicianship will teach comprehensively despite those performance
pressures (p. 126). While Brimmer does not follow the specific Comprehensive Musicianship Through Performance model (O’Toole, 2003; Sindberg 2012; Wisconsin Music Educators Association, 1977), he uses comprehensive methods and topics to achieve his performance goals because he believes it is important to developing musical understanding in his students.

Brimmer’s teaching of music theory, history, style, musical independence, and use of analogies were effective because they directly related to the performance literature he rehearsed with his bands. Theory was taught through carefully planned warm-ups and discussions that were integrated into rehearsals. Hoffer (1983) said that students need lessons to have connections between theoretical concepts and the music they are performing if they are to develop musical understanding (p. 174). In this study, teaching music theory to assist in performance instruction benefitted performance goals without negative effects. Having special music theory days or lessons that are not directly connected to music performance will most likely hinder performance.

Brimmer taught style during rehearsals through music history facts and anecdotes that he felt his students would find interesting and helpful. Rather than taking 15 minutes of rehearsal time to discuss the counterpoint technique of J.S. Bach, he gave short bits of information that benefitted the immediate and long term performance goals of the class. To teach musical independence, he used prompts that required students to remember previous lessons without specific performance directives, and demanded that students take responsibility for their own learning through at-home practice and study. He also encouraged his students to participate in small chamber ensembles so they could become more confident and capable musicians.

Brimmer’s “Guide to Musicality” assignment is an excellent comprehensive musicianship assignment, similar to the unit studies designed by Garofalo (1983) and makes
performance literature the focus of the curriculum. He has his students research the composer, the compositional devices, and the musical terms used in pieces they are rehearsing to achieve a deeper understanding of the music they are performing. A thorough understanding of how and why a piece was composed can only serve to benefit performance. Just as knowing why a stop sign was placed on a street corner makes drivers more likely to stop because of the safety implications, knowing why a composer wrote a crescendo during a passage of chromatic harmony makes students more likely to effectively perform it.

Many music education researchers (e.g. Carlson, 1993; Garofalo, 1983; Garofalo & Whaley, 1979; Labuta, 1997; Sindberg, 2012; Whitener, 1983) have discussed the positive impact musicianship has on performance skills. Music teachers should not be concerned only with giving musical performances, but should be concerned with giving quality musical performances that demonstrate musical understanding. What good is performing several concerts a year if the performers do not truly understand what they are performing and why they are performing it? Whitener (1983) said that “beginning band students show an intense interest in learning about music as well as how to play an instrument,” and that applying comprehensive musicianship “could enhance the musical development of beginning students and prepare them to experience music to a greater depth in succeeding years of instruction based on comprehensive musicianship.” Teaching comprehensively in the middle school band will provide students with conceptual knowledge that is required to effectively perform advanced literature in the high school band. If a band program continues comprehensive instruction throughout a student’s time in middle school and high school and integrates it successfully into daily rehearsals as Brimmer does, then the directors will have ample time to give the musical performances they are concerned about and achieve musical understanding in their students.
Based upon the results of this study, I present the following five suggestions for further research:

1. Further experimental studies into the effectiveness of comprehensive musicianship on performance ability should be conducted with both middle school and high school bands because prior research has yielded conflicting results.

2. The use of comprehensive musicianship in band instruction in urban, suburban, and rural areas should be examined because of the differences in student population, culture, and educational values.

3. Experimental research should be conducted to determine the effect of comprehensive musicianship on student learning efficiency in regards to learning performance repertoire.

4. Further case studies should be conducted to examine how other middle school and high school band directors use the principles of comprehensive musicianship in various teaching environments. An in-depth look at the methods used by practitioners in schools across the country may reveal variations and applications of comprehensive musicianship that could benefit music teachers who are looking for practical ways of integrating it into their daily rehearsals.

5. Examining the attitudes of students in different parts of the country regarding comprehensive musicianship may reveal insights into how varying educational cultures, such as communities that view bands primarily as performance or competitive groups, value comprehensive teaching.
REFERENCES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A:

SUBJECT CANDIDATE SURVEY
Survey Questions for Case Study Candidates

1. What degrees do you hold and from which institutions did you receive them?

2. What is your current position, and how long have you held it?

3. What grade levels do you teach?

4. What classes do you teach?

5. Approximately how many students do you teach?

6. How many years of experience do you have teaching instrumental ensembles professionally?

7. How do you define comprehensive musicianship?

8. Have you received instruction in using comprehensive musicianship teaching methods?
   No Yes
9. If so, where, and to what extent?

10. To what extent do you use Comprehensive Musicianship methods of instruction in your band?

11. Which method books do you use and to what extent?
APPENDIX B:

SELECTED SUBJECT’S COMPLETED SURVEY
Survey Questions for Case Study Candidates

Chosen subject: Rick Brimmer

1. What degrees do you hold and from which institutions did you receive them?
   
   Bachelor of Music in Education and Master of Music in Education, both from BGSU

2. What is your current position, and how long have you held it?
   
   Band Director/Teacher at Lake Local Schools in Millbury, OH for 22 ½ years

3. What grade levels do you teach?
   
   6-12

4. What classes do you teach?
   
   6th Grade lessons (homogeneous) 6th Grade Band (two sections) 7th Grade Band, 8th Grade Band, High School Band

5. Approximately how many students do you teach?
   
   230

6. How many years of experience do you have teaching instrumental ensembles professionally?
   
   26 ½

7. How do you define comprehensive musicianship?
   
   Teaching to all of the state standards in any type of music class. Even though I teach instrumental ensembles, I don't just teach how to play the instruments and how to perform as an ensemble. I include historical and cultural lessons as they pertain to the music we are studying. I include creativity (composing, arranging, improvising) as the music we are studying allows. I include cross-curricular themes that relate to the music lessons. Listening skills are emphasized and lead to students using higher-order thinking skills like analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

8. Have you received instruction in using comprehensive musicianship teaching methods?
   
   No (Not formally)       Yes
9. If so, where, and to what extent?

   *What I have learned has come from professional readings and a lot of trial and error.*

10. To what extent do you use Comprehensive Musicianship methods of instruction in your band?

   *I use the concepts of Comprehensive Musicianship where I feel it will help the students become better performers or better musicians. I confess to a lack of knowledge when it comes to Comprehensive Musicianship “methods”.*

11. Which method books do you use and to what extent?

   *I use the Measures of Success book one with the 6th grade band. 7th and 8th grade bands use the Essential Elements book 2 for a short time each year to learn some of the concepts included there and as sight reading practice.*
APPENDIX C:

HSRB APPROVAL
DATE: January 31, 2012

TO: Christopher Coy
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [291897-2] The Use of Comprehensive Musicianship By a Middle School Band Director: A Case Study

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: January 30, 2012

EXPIRATION DATE: January 1, 2013

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Reviewer Comment:

There are a few typos found in the parent consent letter and the band director letter. For stamping purposes, please email corrected versions of these documents.

- Parent consent: However, video recordings will be made from the back of the classroom to ensure a clear view of the teacher and that the camera be limited to recording students' backs, if at all.

- Band director letter: Thank you very much for considering to participate in this research project.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 151 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.
This approval expires on January 1, 2013. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
APPENDIX D:

ARTIFACTS
# Curtain Up! Performance Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1</th>
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<td>Unsatisfactory tempo</td>
<td>Mostly fluctuating tempo</td>
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<td>Mostly incorrect rhythmic units</td>
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<td>No correct notes</td>
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**Comments:**

**Grand Total:**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Date:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>
Tone Quality/Intonation (40) -

35-40 Tone quality is exceptional for grade/experience level, always in tune.
30-34 Tone quality is characteristic for grade/experience level, usually in tune.
25-29 Tone quality is not characteristic for grade/experience level, often not in tune.
0-24 Tone quality is poor, usually not in tune.

Note/Rhythmic accuracy (40) -

35-40 Notes and rhythms are accurate the majority of the time.
30-34 Notes and rhythms are accurate much of the time.
25-29 Notes and rhythms are often inaccurate.
0-24 Notes and rhythms are usually inaccurate.

Facility/Precision (30) -

27-30 Notes and rhythms are precise and up to tempo the majority of the time.
23-26 Notes and rhythms are precise and up to tempo much of the time.
19-22 Notes and rhythms are sometimes precise and up to tempo.
0-18 Notes and rhythms are rarely precise and up to tempo.

Phrasing (10) -

9-10 Phrasing is well considered and performed.
7-8 Phrasing is often performed well.
0-6 Phrasing is poorly considered and performed.

Articulation (10) -

9-10 Articulations are performed correctly most of the time.
7-8 Articulations are performed correctly much of the time.
0-6 Articulations are performed incorrectly most of the time.

Dynamics (10) -

9-10 Dynamics are performed correctly most of the time.
7-8 Dynamics are performed correctly much of the time.
0-6 Dynamics are performed incorrectly most of the time.

Style/Expression (10) -

9-10 Style and expressive markings are performed correctly most of the time.
7-8 Style and expressive markings are performed correctly much of the time.
0-6 Style and expressive markings are performed incorrectly most of the time.

Total (150) - ________________
# AUDITION EVALUATION

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<td>Good</td>
<td>Superior</td>
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out of 50

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<thead>
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<td>Difficult to determine</td>
<td>Usually correct</td>
<td>Correct</td>
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<table>
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<th>4</th>
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<td>Superior</td>
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<th>5</th>
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<td>Unsteady</td>
<td>Difficult to determine</td>
<td>Usually steady</td>
<td>Steady</td>
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<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>Often incorrect</td>
<td>Usually correct</td>
<td>Correct</td>
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<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Need more contrast</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Superior</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Good</td>
<td>Superior</td>
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<td>Fair</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Superior</td>
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out of 50
# AUDITION EVALUATION

## SIGHT READING SONG

### NOTE ACCURACY

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect</td>
<td>Difficult to determine</td>
<td>Usually correct</td>
<td>Correct</td>
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### RHYTHMIC ACCURACY

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<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Superior</td>
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### STEADY BEAT

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### TEMPO

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<td>Incorrect</td>
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### ARTICULATION

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Need more contrast</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Superior</td>
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### DYNAMICS

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<td>Poor</td>
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### MUSICAL STYLE

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Superior</td>
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out of 50

### GENERAL COMMENTS

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7th Grade Band Terms Test

NAME____________________________

Part 1. Write these terms next to their definitions below. Each is worth six points. 120 points total.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pianissimo</th>
<th>Moderato</th>
<th>Crescendo</th>
<th>Legato</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accent</td>
<td>Mezzo forte</td>
<td>D. C.</td>
<td>Rallentando</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>al fine</td>
<td>Diminuendo</td>
<td>Tenuto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestoso</td>
<td>Staccato</td>
<td>al coda</td>
<td>Sostenuto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arpeggio</td>
<td>D. S.</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>Fortissimo</td>
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</table>

**SPEED**

__________________________ walking speed
__________________________ moderate or medium speed
__________________________ fast
__________________________ gradually becoming slower

**VOLUME**

__________________________ very soft
__________________________ medium loud
__________________________ very loud
__________________________ gradually becoming softer
__________________________ gradually becoming louder

**MOOD OR STYLE**

__________________________ majestically
__________________________ sustained

(more on the back)
ARTICULATIONS

__________________________ emphasize the note
__________________________ smooth and connected
__________________________ short, separated
__________________________ hold full value

MISCELLANEOUS

__________________________ go back to the beginning
__________________________ go back to the sign
__________________________ go to the tail, near the end
__________________________ stop at the double bar line
__________________________ notes of a chord played one at a time

Part 2. Draw the symbols for the following terms. Each is worth six points. 30 points total.

Accent -

Staccato -

Tenuto -

Crescendo -

Diminuendo/Decrescendo -
8th Grade Band Terms Test

NAME_________________________

Write these terms next to their definitions below. You will earn six points for each correct answer. 150 total points.

Pianissimo  Moderato  Crescendo  poco a poco
Accent    Mezzo forte  Allegretto  Rallentando
Andante   al fine     Diminuendo  Tenuto
Maestoso   Staccato  al coda     Sostenuto
Arpeggio  D. S.       Accelerando  Fortissimo
Simile     forte-piano  espressivo  a tempo
Marcato

SPEED

________________________________ walking speed
________________________________ moderate or medium speed
________________________________ moderately fast
________________________________ gradually becoming slower
________________________________ gradually becoming faster
________________________________ return to the previous speed

VOLUME

________________________________ very soft
________________________________ medium loud
________________________________ very loud
________________________________ gradually becoming softer
________________________________ gradually becoming louder
________________________________ loud, then immediately soft
MOOD OR STYLE

_________________________ majestically
_________________________ sustained
_________________________ expressively

ARTICULATIONS

_________________________ emphasize the note
_________________________ marked - heavy emphasis
_________________________ short, separated
_________________________ hold full value

MISCELLANEOUS

_________________________ go back to the sign
_________________________ go to the tail, near the end
_________________________ stop at the double bar line
_________________________ in the same style or manner
_________________________ little by little
_________________________ notes of a chord played one at a time
Guide to Musicality

Step One: The Composer and the Piece

Composer: __________________________________________

Composer's years of birth and death: ___________________

Composer's country of origin: _________________________

Where does/did composer live? _________________________

Title of piece: _____________________________________

Year composed: _____________________________________

Number of movements: _______________________________

If multiple movements, give titles of each. If movements are not titled by the composer, give the tempo markings at start of each movement.

__________________________________________________

__________________________________________________

__________________________________________________

What is the genre of the piece? (e.g. March, Overture, Program Music, Dance, etc.)

__________________________________________________

Time Signature(s): ___________ Key Signature(s): ___________

Tempo(s): __________________________________________
Guide to Musicality

Step Two: Interpretive Choices

Circle the dynamic markings used in your music for this piece.

pp  p  mp  mf  f  ff  crescendo  diminuendo/decrecimiento

Are there places in your music where the accompaniment (full band, small group, solo, etc.) affect these dynamics?_____Yes_____No

How long is a typical musical phrase in this piece?______________

Are you always able to play each phrase in one breath, or are you going to need to use catch breaths at times?_____________________

What types of articulations will you use in this piece? List and define each.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What is the mood of the piece? (e.g. happy, heroic, bold, aggressive, majestic, etc.)

________________________________________________________________________

What is the climactic moment of the piece? Measure(s) number _____
Guide to Musicality

List and define all musical terms found in the piece

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Are there program notes provided in the score? _____ What information can you use from these notes or other sources to help you prepare your performance?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX E:

STUDENT SURVEY
Student Questionnaire

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Be as accurate and honest as possible!

1. What grade level band are you in? __________________________
2. What instrument do you play in the band? ______________________
3. How long have you been playing this instrument? ______________
4. Do you take private lessons on this instrument outside of band class? ______

Answer the following questions by circling the appropriate number on the scale provided

5. How much do you like learning about the following aspects of the music you perform in class?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dislike</th>
<th>Like</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

   when the piece was written, and what happened in the world at that time
   scales and harmonies used, counting rhythms
   talking about how the music sounds when it is played, quality of performance heard, etc
   how the music makes you feel when you hear it, the mood or story the music is trying to convey
   creating melodies or harmonies, either original or based on the music you are playing
   learning how to play the notes and rhythms of the music, performing musical tasks such as dynamics and style
6. Does your teacher give students the chance to “be the teacher” and comment on how they think the class could better perform the music?

   No       Yes

7. If yes, how much do you enjoy this opportunity? (circle one)

   Do Not Enjoy  Somewhat Enjoy  Really Enjoy

8. How often do you volunteer to offer your comments?

   Never       Sometimes       Always

9. Do you feel that learning the following things have helped you become a better musician than if you only learned how to play notes and rhythms? (circle one for each)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>when the piece was written, and what happened in the world at that time</td>
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<td>music is trying to convey</td>
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<td>creating melodies or harmonies, either original or based on the music</td>
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<td>you are playing</td>
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APPENDIX F:

TRANSCRIBED RESPONSES TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Entrance Interview

**Coy:** On your subject survey, you defined comprehensive musicianship as “teaching to the state standards in any type of music class.” Can you explain how you came up with that definition?

**Brimmer:** Back in ’94, when MENC published their voluntary national standards, that pretty well was defined by the whole comprehensive musicianship thing; singing and playing with others, there’s all the being able to perform but also studying history, studying the cultural things and the interdisciplinary things. Eventually, a form of that has been adopted by the state. Our current state standards are set up very similarly to how the voluntary national standards were and they are going to be revising those standards here in the next couple of years; but, what they are still basically saying is that in general, in every music class, whether it be in a general music class at the elementary level or in a band, choir, or orchestra at the high school level we should be hitting on all these different areas. Obviously you are going to hit more on the performance area in a high school performing ensemble than you would with an elementary classroom, but they should be hitting all of these areas and that’s kind of where I keep seeing this evolve. I think a lot of us are using comprehensive musicianship in our teaching and maybe don’t even know that we are doing that because we are trying to hit those state standards.

**Coy:** You said much of what you have learned about the importance of comprehensive musicianship came from trial and error and professional readings. Give some specific examples of resources, such as workshops or readings that have given you teaching ideas.

**Brimmer:** I try to keep up with a lot of professional journals, obviously the ones that come through OMEA, *The Triad,* the ones that come through MENC, the *Teaching Music* one has been a good resource for a lot of years. I subscribe to *The Instrumentalist* magazine, and all of these are just, you find an article here or there; not just comprehensive musicianship but they will occasionally include, how do you work in some of those, into a band or choir situation, how do you work in those cultural or interdisciplinary subject things when you don’t have; let me back track. Sometimes you will have administrators that say “we want you to do an interdisciplinary unit with another teacher.” So let’s get an English teacher that’s going to be studying this particular piece of literature and it’s from the same historical time period as the social studies class is studying at the same time and lets have them do an interdisciplinary unit where the English teacher is getting more into the historical/cultural aspects and the social studies teacher is getting into more of the language arts realm; just trying to show the interconnection between the two.

I think it’s a terrific idea when those kinds of opportunities present themselves; they don’t very often present themselves to a high school ensemble, simply because if you’ve got a grade 9-12 ensemble, those kids aren’t in all those same classes, so you can’t really do that. Middle school is maybe a little bit easier if you have defined grade level groups but you are not going to hit everybody in that, let’s just say, if it was going to be a math class. We’re studying fractions in terms of rhythms, they’re studying fractions just in terms of numbers; how do we do an
interdisciplinary thing that will work for the kids who are in band because they’ve obviously got both classes but for the kid who’s in the math class but isn’t in band, they’re not getting that interdisciplinary stuff. So I would read articles that would usually say, how do you do those things in a band, choir, or orchestra situation that you maybe can’t do some of those other things that are so obvious that they could do with other classes. So I have gotten a lot of resources from that. I’ll tell you that I don’t do a lot of actual interaction with the other teachers in terms of trying to teach the same things they are teaching in any given moment; but I pretty well know here’s what kids are learning in 6th-grade science, here’s what they are learning in 7th-grade science and so I can maybe equate some of what they are learning in some of those science classes to what we’re doing in band.

**Coy:** Why is learning in a comprehensive manner important for middle school band students?

**Brimmer:** Middle school kids; there’s two big reasons why they join band in the first place; (1) they want to be with their friends, and their friends are joining band; (2) they enjoyed music in elementary so they made the decision to join band. What they want to do is play songs. What I tell them is I don’t train monkeys; we can train monkeys to play songs, but I want them to learn more than just how to play songs. I want them to learn how to read the music, I want them to learn how to interpret the music, I want them to learn how to find out how to find the answers to why does it do this, why did the composer do it this way, what did the composer want from me here. The reason that I give to them is that I am not always going to be here. There’s going to be a point in time that you’re going to graduate from high school and can’t keep coming back to me saying “Mr. Brimmer, teach me this song.” At that point, we hope that you’re able to buy music or play in a group like a community group, community theatre or something like that where you’re able to do those things on your own. If we don’t teach them in a comprehensive manner all they’re doing is just playing notes and rhythms.

**Coy:** Musical independence?

**Brimmer:** Right. Ultimately, if they are able to be more musically independent as performers, then that makes them better music consumers because they are more knowledgeable consumers of music as well.

**Coy:** Do you think there are any cons to teaching comprehensively?

**Brimmer:** For me, it’s gotten a lot easier the longer I’ve taught. I’ve had a number of student teachers over the years who when they observe me teaching, and I do a lot of teaching with analogy and they will say “boy, I’ve got to learn to get some of those, I’ve got to get more stories to tell because when you tell stories the kids are really involved and they get it.” Because I’m trying to take them from something they know; maybe I’ll use art. As a painter, if you’re just doing a picture and it’s all in one color because it’s the only color you have available to you, you can draw trees, flowers, houses, and people but they are all in one color. It’s a more interesting picture, a more vivid picture, if you have a lot of different colors, and I’ll equate colors to whether it be dynamic contrast or articulation contrast.
For me, it’s become second nature. As a young teacher I wasn’t able to do it and I think that’s the biggest con to trying to do this. It’s not how I was taught. I don’t think it’s how a lot of people are taught. We tend to teach the way we were taught. It takes a lot of effort to be able to bring these things into the classroom.

Coy: Would you say it adds on to the amount of time it takes you to prepare a lesson?

Brimmer: It did, and I probably still put a good deal of effort into it, trying to find new things to bring in, but I don’t think I spend as much time now I as did originally when I started to think “I need to teach in a more comprehensive manner; I need to include more of these things.” Yeah it’s a lot more work for me, but the results for the kids were obviously much better.

Coy: In your survey, you mentioned the importance of exploring cultural and historical issues in the music you perform. Describe some ways you study these elements in class.

Brimmer: I can give you a perfect example just from the two songs the 6th-grade band has been working on for the last few weeks. We have a piece called Cossack Marching Song, which is a Russian folk song, and we are working on an American march called Mount Vernon. Although they’re both technically marching songs, they’re not played in the same style because they are from different cultures. We started yesterday just exploring a little bit of very basics of one’s Russian, one’s American, and I intend over the next few weeks to expand on that. It was sufficient at this point for sixth graders that they just get the idea that it’s two different countries that we’re dealing with, and I’m not going into a lot of detail about what the Cossack culture is. I don’t know that we need to get into a lot of that, but simply I think they need to understand how to perform, especially an American march because they’re going to do a lot of that. They are Americans and it’s a very common genre for bands to play; but, I want them to understand that there are different kinds of marches, and as they go on through the years that they will experience marches that are from orchestra music and obviously there is a different style to be played. There are different styles for all of those. If you bring that kind of stuff in, it just gives them a deeper understanding of what you’re trying to say. Instead of just saying “tongue harder” or “make it bounce more.” They won’t know why they’re doing that and if they can now pick up a piece of music and say “this is a march, written by let’s see, that’s a composer I recognize,” be it Karl King or John Philip Sousa, whomever it is, “that means it’s American style so I have to do this,” even before they start to play.

Coy: So would you say that this helps your students’ learning efficiency?

Brimmer: Oh, absolutely. Because now by the time they get into high school I can already say to them, “we’re gonna sight read this piece of music, tell me everything you know about this piece of music.” We try to do some of this as we are preparing for sight reading with the high school. Let’s try to learn everything we can about a song before we start to play it. I know we are talking middle school, but it’s the middle school that leads you to this.

When we went to sight reading [at contest] last Saturday and they got their four minutes to study, and as soon as the judge said you may begin, the room erupted with conversation. Everybody
was talking to everybody else about how here’s everything I’m seeing in the music. They weren’t just saying key signatures and time signatures, they were saying watch out for crescendos and look at the style change over here, and what kind of music is this. They were going into all of these great details and the judge commented on that afterwards, on how great it was to see them engaged in such thoughtful discussion instead of just watch out there is an A natural there.

Coy: So in your opinion, taking care of all this and teaching it in the middle school band makes teaching in high school a lot easier?

Brimmer: Absolutely. Yeah, because if you’re doing it with the younger kids you can just keep expanding on that with high school and then when those kids go off to perform in an honor band or they decide they want to pursue music after college, you know they’ve got a great foundation and you don’t have to worry that they are going to get there and are just playing notes and rhythms.

Coy: One of my major points in my proposal was that teaching this way in middle school prepares students to play more advanced repertoire in the high school.

Brimmer: I’ve found that a typical 7th-grade band for me, if we sight read a piece of music, we’re looking for something we are going to use for our next concert, it can take an entire class period. You know, 40 minutes just to get through a warm-up and then play through one piece of music because we take the time to study it. We take the time to say what’s the style, where did this music come from, do we recognize the composer, are there any historical or cultural things that we need to be aware of? It takes a long time. In high school you only get four minutes and then you have to play the whole song, and yeah because they have been prepped in junior high and in 8th grade I can usually get through two songs in a class period because we don’t do as much of it as we do in high school, but because we are going through that process. They get to high school and we can sight read a piece of music, and we can still get through our entire concert program in a class period.

Coy: What are some ways you have included cross-curricular themes in your middle school bands?

Brimmer: Well the obvious was the one with rhythms and fractions. There are a lot of middle school and even high school kids that are still confused by the whole fraction thing, and I understand their confusion when it comes to rhythms because we tell them the whole note is equal to four but a quarter note is equal to one and they eventually can start to see there is a four to one ratio there and it’s a little bit confusing for them when they are younger just because they don’t always get that relationship, but it does, it seems to help and generally speaking, the kids who stick around in band, their math scores are better and I think that could be part of it because they are learning that. I do a lot with the other arts and I talked about the whole drawing a picture with one color and equating that to the things we do. We talk with language arts, a real common theme we use is when a writer is doing a fictional book where there’s a storyline and eventually you come to, you know, the climax of the piece whether it’s a murder mystery or something
where the butler did it and there is a dénouement after it. In literature it’s generally accepted that there is going to be some foreshadowing and there’s gonna be eventually this big climax and then here’s how the detective figured it out at the end. A lot of times music will do the same thing. You might get a little bit of foreshadowing. There’s just a little rhythmic figure or a short little melodic figure that shows up as a counter-melody or as part of the accompaniment and then all of a sudden that shows up later in the song. We do that foreshadowing for the audience so that they get the connection when it comes later and that the climax of the piece isn’t always the last note. Everything is not Salieri where you have to give them a nice bump at the end to say you can clap now. Marches do that; marches give them a nice bump at the end to say clap now and you don’t get the dénouement. We try to show there’s a similarity there and of course when they go to their language arts classes they say “oh, I know what dénouement is.” So I try to bring those kinds of things in as much as I’m able to, wherever I can see a correlation.

From my own experience, in high school I never took an art class. I did not study architecture or drafting or anything like that, but because I had studied music, and I had taken a music history and theory course, I saw a lot of the interconnection between what was going on in music at the time and what was going on in art, what was going on in architecture. I got to college and was taking a test to try and test out of some general studies and there were questions about artists that I had never heard of. Because I could place them in a time period, I could get the answer right on the test. I remember vividly that there was a picture of a cathedral over in Europe and it asked based on the architecture of this building, when was it built? Having never studied architecture but because of the elaborateness, all the squiggly lines everywhere, I said it matches the Baroque period. I guess that’s probably somewhere in the sixteen, early 1700s. I must have done pretty well on the test because I tested out of several general studies classes having never studied those things specifically, but being able to draw correlations between what was going on in music. We just need to help kids find those correlations.

Coy: How to you develop individual and group creativity, specifically, composing, arranging, and improvising in your middle school bands?

Brimmer: I start these things in middle school. We got a great new method book. I liked our old method book, we were using Essential Elements 2000, and now we are using Measures of Success, and I like this one even better because it has composition exercises right from the first chapter; they call them opuses. There’s composition things, they are very simple things at first, ya know, you need to draw notes that you know to fill these two measures. You can use any rhythm you know, any rhythm that you’ve studied, any notes that you know. I think that its gonna help lead us even farther into this as we go along. I feel like this is something I’ve not been doing as much of as I’d like to.

I have tried in the past to use different composition things with my students, one that I did a few years ago that I had some success with and I used with 7th and 8th grade as well as high school. One of their assignments was you have to create an eight measure rhythm pattern, in 4/4 time, a rhythm pattern; anything you can perform. Don’t make it so hard that you can’t perform it. I gave them a lot of details, you know. The last note has to be either a half note or a whole note, you can use a rest but it can’t be more than four consecutive counts of rest. You must use at least
some mix of eighth notes, quarter notes, sixteenth notes, and at least a half note for the last note, just to give them some parameters. Then we would use that as our warm up exercise. “Okay everyone, we are going to use the rhythm that Tommy, over here, wrote. I’m going to write it on the board and we’re going to play a scale and each measure of the rhythm is one note of the scale. So, for measure one you play the first note of your scale, etc.” I try to get them into, “I have to think rhythmically as a composer and now I have to think rhythmically as a performer; how could I have written that differently to make that easier for them to read, or is that rhythm really appropriate or was I just trying to show how smart I am by writing a really complex rhythm but no one would actually want to play that because it doesn’t really...just because it’s complex doesn’t mean it’s good.”

So I have tried to do some things like that with the students. I think that’s something I need to do more of. I need to get them into more composing, arranging. There’s a great exercise for the 6th graders to do in the book where they have Alouette written out for them in 4/4 time, now you rewrite it in 2/4 time. Take the same notes and change it rhythmically, what’s the relationship between the notes. It’s a great little arranging exercise and I’m hoping now that those 6th graders are exposed to more of that because it wasn’t in the previous book, they didn’t have exercises like that, now that they’ve got that I can ask them as 7th graders, let’s go a step further and be a little more creative. Maybe we need someone to write just a little four measure chorale for us to play.

I saw a guest conductor for an honor band do this once, and the group wrote their own warm-up, and he had very few instructions other than on the first note, the tubas must play Bb. Everybody else, you can choose concert Bb, D, or F for this chord. Now we are going to move to the second chord and you can choose if you want to make it a note that’s right next to it or if you want to use the same note you can, or if you want to put some sort of a leap in there you can, but here are the notes of the next chord you can choose from and its F, A, or C. They each sat there and literally wrote their own chorale based on a chord structure that he had developed, and I thought that’s a great exercise. I’d love to do that with a group, but you’ve got to have a group that understands those things. I’d like to do more of that.

Coy: Now how about improvising?

Brimmer: This is probably where I am weakest. We don’t play a lot of songs, we don’t have a jazz band so we don’t specifically teach improvising as such as in a setting like that, and we really just don’t have a lot of opportunities within the literature we are studying, and because it doesn’t come up in that literature, I don’t do as much of it as I would like to. Probably the closest thing I get to improvising is I tell them, this works well for a percussionist who gets lost, you are playing through the song and you’ve lost your place. Just keep playing; play something that’s steady, similar to what you’ve been doing. Make up your own patterns until you find your way back in and chances are nobody will ever notice you were even lost. It’s a little harder to do on a melodic instrument because obviously you have to be able to play the same notes or they don’t fit into the chords or anything, but I still encourage them, “look, if you’re lost, don’t stop playing; don’t give up. If its not a brand new song you should have some idea of where we are and you can use that; at the very least, you can say, I know I had an F at the start of the measure
and I played an F and it sounded right, so I’m just gonna kind of hold that F, maybe that will fit into the chord structure.” But that’s about as close as I’ve come to doing anything with improvising.

**Coy:** Can you describe your process for creating long-term goals and short-term objectives for your bands?

**Brimmer:** Well when I look at long-term goals I start with their coming to me with some general knowledge about music and where do I want them to be when they graduate. Since they are with me throughout the program, I try to envision all the way through graduation and hopefully to give them the tools to move beyond school and continue playing for the rest of their lives. So I try to think, what are the things that are going to give them those tools. What do they need to be able to do if they are going to be life-long consumers of music? Certainly they need to be able to read the notes and play them on their instruments and things like that, but I want them to be intelligent consumers of music as well. So that means they need to be able to make evaluations of music, their own and others’. So that’s where I come from in terms of trying to set long-term goals. Of course you have to set all kinds of, you know how many steps is it going to take me to get from where they are at, to that. So in the short term I look for a method book for beginners, and I’ve gone through several of them in my career; I’m looking for the things that are going to give them good fundamentals in as many areas as I can, which is one of the reasons I like this book even better than the book I was using. *The Measures of Success* book does thing with composition, arranging and making evaluations. It has them do listening exercises; it has them do like the boy from 7th grade was talking about today as he was walking about, “I can hear a song and figure out how to play it on my instrument.” It helps them do that kind of a thing, which hopefully leads someday to improvisation as they become more aware of “I’m not thinking ink spots on a page, I am thinking sound patterns and stuff like that.” It gives them all that foundation in that plus all the notes, rhythms, and dynamics and things like that. Now, it becomes a challenge in that you have to find the right pieces of literature that then can do that next step. This is one of the things I do a lot better now than I used to earlier in my career, which was more like “I like that song, I like this song lets just choose those things,” and now I’m a little more discerning and think, “my kids know how to do pairs of 8th notes, but they need to work on single 8th notes,” so I need to think of something that’s going to help them learn that. Now they’ve got to work on dotted 8th-16th patterns, and I’m looking for things because you’re taking them from the known to the unknown and I’m looking for things like that in the music. Obviously you’re looking for things like range; you’re looking for things that are going to challenge them musically. I don’t generally do a lot of really slow stuff with the 6th-grade band because they don’t do it very well, and as you get into 7th grade you need to challenge them to do phrases and things like that because you are leading them down a path where hopefully they can do all these things.

It fluctuates every year and it’s one of the things I say to my administrators. I don’t have a text book, I have an entire library full of text books and I have to choose based on what each group really needs. For instance, I have two 8th grade boys who play baritone, both originally were trumpet players that struggled with trumpet because they could not hit the right partials; everything was too low. After a couple years of trying different brass instruments they finally
settled in on baritone because they could hit different partials but they still struggled to hit those partials, even as 8th graders. It just so happens that I have some trombone players who can hear their right partials, so I early in the year was trying to choose music where the trombone and baritone were the same part, so that they can get some support; “I know I’m playing the right note if I am matching those other people.” It’s hard to find music that’s appropriate like that for the 8th grade because with the rhythmic challenges and range things that you would find in a typical grade two piece of music, the trombone and baritone part are usually split. It becomes a challenge to find stuff that is going to challenge the other students as well; you don’t want them all playing 7th grade music just because these two boys are struggling and they need something that’s more 7th grade level. I have some favorites and I keep a couple drawers full of music that are my first stops. Every year I look and say for this particular group, which of these songs is going to take us to that next step.

**Coy:** What are you long term goals for your 6th-grade band?

**Brimmer:** I like to think that by the time we get to the end of the year, they’ve learned to watch me as a conductor, they can listen across the band and not just to the individual parts but they can hear the other parts from other sections and see how their piece fits in. Obviously, there’s all the notes and rhythms and dynamics and most of that is dictated by the first year book. They’re going to learn a certain body of notes and a certain body of rhythmic patterns but more importantly than just those things, those are fundamentals, I want them to learn to play with a group, not just by themselves. Of course, 6th-grade band is split into two and as you have seen, the 4th period group still struggles with that. They often can’t hold a song together because a group of them, whether it is the flutes or saxophones, just goes too fast and the rest of the band doesn’t and they get separated and don’t even realize that they are not together. So they’re gonna make it, but the 8th period group caught onto that a lot faster. That’s just the different make-up of the group. Those are the big things. I want them to follow me as a conductor, want them to listen to each other. We talk about matching pitch, we talk intonation even though we are only in their first year. We talk about intonation fairly early on trying to match exactly and then we talk a lot about adjusting volumes in terms of melody versus accompaniment. I want them to start to see those things for themselves. “I’ve got a bunch of half notes here, I don’t need to be the loudest thing in the room” or “I’ve got a lot of quarter notes and eighth notes. Maybe I should play a little bit stronger.” I want them to start seeing those things for themselves so I don’t have to tell them every step of the way. I just said it to a group yesterday, “don’t get softer here because I told you to, get softer here because look at what’s going on in the music.” That’s the thing; I want them to start seeing those things. Even though they are in 6th grade they are capable of doing that.

**Coy:** Let’s take it a step further. Those 6th graders are now 7th graders. What are your long term goals for your 7th-grade band?

**Brimmer:** This group of 7th graders, they struggled since the beginning of the year and we saw it today in the pieces that they were playing. They struggle with staying together still. It isn’t that they don’t have the skills to play the notes because they can play their notes, they can play their rhythms, and they can play style things, at a 7th grade level. They aren’t polished on these songs,
but you can tell they still don’t listen to each other. So that’s still a big push with that group. You need to focus on what else is going on. They still tend to just play all one volume, and it’s not that they can’t get louder or softer but if “I’m playing loud, I play loud. It doesn’t matter if I’ve got whole notes or whether I’ve got 8th notes, I just play loud. If I play soft then I just play soft and it doesn’t matter what I’m doing.” Obviously they’re not making any kind of rise and fall through phrases and things like that.

Ideally, I like to work with the 7th grade a lot more on phrasing, shaping phrases; obviously there are a lot more technical skills they need to develop. They need to get more scales under their fingers and more rudiments for the percussionists. They need to extend their ranges. They need to work on tone quality. If there’s anything this 7th grade has worked on more, one of the things they do a lot better than the current 6th grade is, they can have a much stronger tone quality; its darker, its warmer, they’ve got decent instrumentation, and it’s one of the things we do a lot of in 7th grade; we expand our instrumentation. So you have some students, who are almost like starting over again, and then you always have students that come in at the beginning of the year that didn’t play last year and you gotta try and catch them up. So, in a group like that there’s a lot of lessons going on simultaneously, because you’re not just teaching a 7th grade band piece, you’re teaching that trumpet player who just started at the beginning of the year, you’re teaching that boy who just switched over to tuba from trombone at the same time as you’re teaching those other trombone players that are ready to move on to more challenging things. It’s a big juggling match when you get to 7th grade.

Coy: To put it in perspective, would you say that 7th grade is more about solidifying what one learned in 6th grade, or would you say that you are really trying to move forward?

Brimmer: Ideally, everything that you do in one grade, you try to just make that more solid the next year and then you add on more things. So, this 7th grade is unique for me in that they still struggle with that staying together thing. I attribute some of that to just those new people and there’s a little bit of a personal dynamic involved. Certain sections think they’re better than other sections and therefore everyone should follow them, and we’re still fighting some of those issues. But ideally in a 7th grade band I like to think that we’re moving on from that too. Just like I say, we’re working more on tone quality, working more on intonation, we’re working more on phrasing; we’re getting into more detail. The other day when we talked to the 6th graders about the Cossack March, and we just said what are Cossacks? We discovered they are an ethnic group in Russia. That’s enough. That’s all the detail we need to go into. Now if I was going to be doing some Tchaikovsky piece with the high school band, obviously I’d be going into a lot more detail about the culture, you know, that was enough for 6th graders, and so for 7th graders, yeah we’re expanding on what we’ve done before but going into more detail.

Coy: So common sense begs the question, what’s next for 8th grade, keeping in mind the culture and other comprehensive lessons?

Brimmer: Right. Yeah I guess I hadn’t talked as much about that. We think yeah, we got a concert next week. But with 8th grade, I really try to, and I tell the 8th graders this from the first day of school. This is your chance to prove to me that you’re ready for the high school band.
That’s what we’re going to be doing this year. I’m going to talk to you about, here’s what the expectations for you next year will be and see if you can reach those expectations by the end of the year. Again, its expanding on better intonation, better tone, a wider range of notes available to you, more complex rhythms and all of those things; but I guess 7th and 8th grade is where I really start to get into more of the comprehensive musicianship types of things.

The one assignment that I had the 7th and 8th grade do, just prior to your coming here, was that guide to musicality that I showed you. Some of that is just simply what’s the title of the piece, what’s the composer’s name, when was it composed, and you know, what are the dynamic markings in your music. Some of that is just factual based stuff, but then we talk about what information you get about the song from the title. Some titles don’t give any information whatsoever, you know, “symphony no. 1.” That doesn’t give a, that wouldn’t give a middle school kid a whole lot of information because they don’t understand the concept of what a symphony is other than its one of those big boring pieces that orchestras play. Whereas yesterday with the 8th grade band I started reading the poem, “The Rowan Tree,” you know. We try to get more into why did the composer write this, what is the composer trying to say with this? Not just what are the ink spots on the page, but what inspired this piece? Is it programmatic, or is it just some sort of absolute music, but in absolute music you’ve got a lot of different genres, you know. If it’s a march, it says march in the title and that should tell you something about how you’re going to perform this piece. If you look at the composer and you see James Swearingen, you should have some idea because they’ve played James Swearingen pieces before. If you read, you know, anything in the Harry Potter series, you know basically the kind of literature before you even pick up the next book. You know it, because you know the author. It’s the same way with composers. You get to know certain composers that way and so you try to get that information.

In that guide to musicality they need to do a little bit more detailed research. One of the questions is a very open ended question. It says, “Are there program notes in the score,” which if there are, I share those program notes with them, and then, “what other sources can you use to help you prepare for a performance of this song?” Now they have to start thinking, where can I get more information about this? Of course, the first thing on their mind is, “I go to You Tube and see if there is a performance, and that I can listen to somebody else.” That’s not necessarily a bad thing; there’s a lot of bad performances on You Tube but they might find some good ones too. But, at least that gets them to the computer and then maybe they say, “maybe I can find out more about this not just on You Tube, maybe there’s other sources that I can go to where I can find out maybe more details about the composer, more details about this particular piece, maybe if I type in the title of the piece, what will come up;” and for instance the “Rowan Tree” would, you know, if you just do a Google search for “Rowan Tree” it doesn’t automatically send you to this song. You’re going to get references to the poem and maybe you’re going to get references to the person who wrote the poem and, you know, the culture of that time period. Just by asking that question, where can I find these things, it steers most of them to, “now I’m going to go and actually do that.” Then they can bring that information back to the group to say “hey, this is something we could be doing more with this song, if we all understood this.”

I do a lot more asking of them, “What do you think?” “How was that performance?” I’ve started to do that more with the even with the 6th grade, but I do more of that with the 7th and 8th grade
when they’re focused, and that’s a tricky thing with that age group because they have to be focused. You get done playing a portion of a song or a whole song, and you start asking very pointed questions; “How do you think we sounded in terms of tone quality? What do you think, was that an emotional performance? Did we play under control?” or whatever the questions are. I try to ask very direct questions that will lead them to give me, you know, “I have to think about the answer, I can’t just say yes or no,” or “Mr. Brimmer always tells us we don’t do our articulations very well so when he asks about our articulations I’ll just say not very well.” Don’t guess what I’m thinking, give me your opinion.

End of Week One Reflective Discussion

**Coy:** Based on what I noticed in class, such as you asking the sixth graders about their accuracy of style and phrasing, what is the role of self-assessment in your middle school bands?

**Brimmer:** What students want to do, is they want to please their teacher. That’s true, the vast majority of the time. Even the kids that are the troublemakers or the ones who won’t stop talking, they really want to please you, and they want to hear you say that they did well. If you tell them that they did well, and it doesn’t matter if they did or not, if you tell them they did well they are happy with themselves. If you tell them that they did poorly and they’re unhappy, and if you only ever tell them they do well, they stop working because they don’t need to work. If you only tell them they do poorly, they stop working because they say “I’m never going to get it so I may as well quit,” and so you have to try and find a way, in your own comments and you kind of have to gauge. Do they need more compliments or do they need more criticism, but you have to give some of each, and then after you’ve done that for a short time at the beginning of the year or whenever, then you can do more, “now what do you think?”

At first, especially the younger kids, they want to guess what you’re thinking. If you ask them, if I had asked that same boy about articulation back in October, he would have said, “not very good,” because he’s heard me say a lot of times that they don’t do “T” sounds. They just blow and maybe they move their jaw or maybe they huff and puff but they don’t really use the tongue to start notes. He would have just said not very well, even if they had done it well. But now, they can give me better answers and most of them know now, at least at this point in the year that “I don’t have to give the answer that he thinks, I’m going to give the answer that I think,” and by doing that I’ve given them the freedom to have a different opinion than the person that sits next to them because, and it didn’t happen so much today, but I’ve had this happen before where I’ll ask them “how many of you think or raise your hand if you think we did a good dynamic contrast there at measure nine.” And you get a bunch of kids that say “I did!” And you see a bunch of kids that say, “Oh I didn’t do that dynamic contrast.” But wait, I didn’t ask that I asked “do you think we did a good job with that?” Then a bunch of hands go down and you say “do you think we can do better?” Then they all say “yeah” and you then say, “okay, prove it.”

By making them do that self-assessment, then hopefully it eventually leads them to, I don’t even have to ask them questions anymore. I’d like to think that by the time I get to a high school band I don’t have to say, “watch out. It says to be piano at measure 12.” Not only do they see it
coming but, if you never tell them, they will get softer. You just won’t notice it because they make very small changes. By doing all of this in the middle school, by the time they get to high school, if they didn’t do it, they will start telling each other and you don’t even have to take any class time to go over it. It speeds up the process, makes their performances better, because you take the time in the middle school to do that.

**Coy:** During 6th grade band, you played an original recording of “Music of the Night,” which is one of the pieces they are rehearsing. What do you hope your students gained from that experience and what are some other instances where you have done this?

**Brimmer:** In this particular case, what I was mostly concerned with was, I wanted them to understand the tempo. It’s a very slow song. Obviously they are not going to play it as slow as on the stage since they are 6th graders and two, it would be an inappropriate tempo for an instrumental version. For this song it was, I wanted them to hear tempo. I just really wanted them to hear tempo. I’ll play that song again for them later, probably in another week or two, and at that point it will be shaping phrases. Hear how his voice rises and falls with the phrase and we want you to do the same sort of thing and not just keep everything at the same volume. That’s kind of what I hoped to do with that.

With the 7th or 8th grade band, I typically, as the high school band is preparing for large group contest, have them sight read the music that the 7th and 8th grade bands are playing and I record the high school band. Of course the high school band is sight reading and this is the first time they have ever seen that piece of music, and then I’ll play that for the 7th or 8th grade band, whichever is appropriate and say “this is what we are aiming for,” you know. This is kind of what we are supposed to sound like in terms of balance, in terms of tone quality, whatever those things are that we are still lacking. I’ll also record that 7th grade and 8th grade band playing those pieces, and I have some recordings from three or four weeks ago that I’m hanging on to because I want them to hear those recordings again later to say, “here’s what you sounded like way back then and now, we just recorded you today, and hear what you sound like today. Do you hear an improvement? If so, what are you doing better now than you did then and where do we still need to go before we can consider ourselves performance ready?”

I brought in other recordings. I sometimes have professional recordings of songs they are working on and I’ll sometimes bring them in. Professional recordings have their place. I definitely think they should be used, but when you can point to that high school kid who is maybe an older brother or sister of some of those kids in the room, or the kid who lives down the street, or the kid who rides their bus, that’s what that person sounds like, now they know its an attainable goal. If they only listen to professional recordings they say “oh, we will never sound that good.” But if they can say, “oh that was just the high school band that meets in here in the morning before me, oh I can do that. Maybe not yet, but I’ll be able to reach that goal someday.” Obviously you need to do some of both because if you only let them hear the high school band then you are not really setting the bar very high.
Coy: I noticed that you have several 7th and 8th-grade students working on solos or participating in ensembles. Why is chamber music important for middle school students?

Brimmer: I can give you a perfect example with the one 7th grade girl who is working on a trumpet solo. She’s not the best trumpet player in the room. She currently sits fourth chair, so first chair second part. She reads well, she’s got a really nice tone, but she doesn’t think she’s very good. She thinks these other kids are better than her. It’s not because she ended up fourth chair, she really doesn’t think she’s very good. When we started experimenting with solo and ensemble, I asked her “maybe you want to play this solo or maybe look at an ensemble,” and she started playing them and I thought “wow, maybe that would be a good solo for you, you sound pretty good at that, maybe you should try that one.” So she took the music home, she worked on it over the weekend and the next week she came back, and I said “why don’t you play some of that for me?” She played a little and I said, “that’s pretty good. You gotta really nice sound.” The first part of the song is very lyrical and it could show off what beautiful tone she has and I said “you’ve got beautiful tone, you’re very expressive, and I think this would be a very good piece for you to take to solo and ensemble.” All of a sudden her eyes lit up and she started playing stronger in class, she’s becoming a leader; in fact, one day the rest of the trumpet section was just kind of down that day. They weren’t really playing all that well that day, and she was playing very well, so I pointed that out and made sure that the boy who sat first chair knew. I said “you better watch out, she’s gonna challenge you for first chair very soon, she’s gonna be saying I want to challenge you, and if you’re not careful she’s gonna take first chair away from you.” Because she’s playing stronger, now he has to think “maybe I better get working harder” and it raises the level of the whole group. That’s just one example.

The other thing is when you’re playing, especially in chamber music where you’re playing trios and quartets and things like that, now you’re the only person on your part. You can hide as one of six second clarinet players. You can hide in the group somewhere and not make any noise. As long as you’re moving your fingers your director won’t even know you’re not playing on any given day unless he were to single you out or something, but when you’re playing as the only person on the second clarinet part in a trio, if you’re not playing, everybody knows it. It helps them to know that it develops independence and creates some security in themselves that “I can play my part” and some independence: “I have to be able to read my own rhythms, I have to be able to play my own notes, I have to play with good support so I can hear that I’m tuning not with people that are playing the same note, but with people who are playing different notes.” It makes them listen harder, it makes them think harder, and ultimately you wind up with a better band because of it.

Coy: I noticed that you use large group adjudicated events as a primary motivator for musicality in your bands. What are the benefits to this, and are there any cons?

Brimmer: The main benefit is your parents love you. They are going to clap for you no matter what you do and I can say that because I’ve been to some band concerts for my own children and the bands didn’t perform all that well, but they always get a standing ovation. They’re your parents; they love you. How do you know you’re very good if the only people you play in front of are your parents because your parents aren’t going to tell you if you’re not measuring up. You
need to compare yourself not just to the person who sits down the row from you in your section, but you need to compare yourself to a larger pool if you want to know if you are any good or not. I was first chair in the percussion section my sophomore year in high school. What incentive was there for me to get any better? I was already the best that we had so there was no reason for me to work at it. Had I been told, “you might be the best one here, but let’s face it, there are only eight of you, and these three kids never even took band in junior high and they are new this year,” or something like that, maybe I would have been more motivated to work harder; so I try to use it as a motivator. It’s easy to get your parents to clap for you. How do you get strangers to clap for you? Let’s face it, if you want to be a good musician you can’t just impress your parents. You just want to play for fun that’s fine, you know, it can be a nice allocation of your time, but you need to push yourself to do more.

The only con that I can think of that can really come from competition is if they get so focused on the results and not what…as I like to say it’s not about the destination, it’s about the journey.

End of Week Three Reflective Discussion

**Coy:** Based on asking the 7th-grade trombone players how much they want to play *Lassus Trombone*, and asking your students for their opinion of music you are sight reading, how much do you value student input and what is its role in your comprehensive teaching?

**Brimmer:** I don’t think the real issue is how much emphasis I put on their opinion. It’s not that I don’t listen to them, but it’s more. I want them to think. I’ll use the for instance of sight reading. I’ll usually bring out two or three different pieces, usually more with the older students, and we will sight read all of them and then I’ll say, “which one do you think is gonna be best for us?” Of course with the younger kids its “which one do you think is going to be best for us“ and I kind of leave it open as a wide open question. As they get older, we’ll usually say things like we want to be thinking in terms of the audience; is it something the audience is going to enjoy. We don’t want all of our songs to be the same style. We want to have some variety, so think about your audience but think about your part. Is this going to be interesting for you to play, is it going to be fun? If it’s not interesting for you, you’re not going to want to work on it and things like that, but think about the other people as well because, let’s face it, we’re working on a piece that is all winds and a very smooth, flowing ballad style and there’s no percussion; those people are going to sit back there and are going to be bored, so as they get older I try to add more and more of those kinds of things for them to think about.

But I do listen a little bit to them. I guess the reason I ask the 7th grade today about *Lassus Trombone* was, if the trombones as a group said “no, I don’t want to do this because it’s too hard and we’re not going to be ready in time, or I just don’t like this song, or I just don’t want to be featured,” that settles the question. You know, there’s nothing forcing them to do something that they probably don’t have time to do anyhow. If they say, like they did, “yeah we want to work on it,” but if you notice there was only one girl who was like “yes we want to” and then there were about three or four boys that were like “um, yeah I guess we do,” and they were just kind of going along with her. There were a couple who didn’t answer probably because they don’t care one way or the other because they figured they probably won’t be able to do it anyhow. They
don’t have the skills themselves. I can give them that and then I can say “okay, here is what we need to do, you need to get those instruments home over the weekend” and when school gets out and we’re done with class and I go around and look and say “oh let’s see how many trombones got left behind,” when they come back on Monday I say, “okay let’s see what you got done;” if they can’t play it, we know why. Instruments didn’t go home and it makes it very easy to say that’s why we’re not doing the song. If the instruments go home and they’re still not able because they probably just don’t have enough time to pull this together with only two more rehearsals, then I say “sorry, we aren’t going to be able to program it for the concert. That doesn’t mean we can’t still work on it after the concert so you can have the enjoyment of learning to play it and maybe we will try and find a way to play it for the school or something, just do a little feature thing toward the end of the year, or something like that, who knows. The fact that they’re working on it doesn’t necessarily mean it has to go into a concert. But, the short answer to your question is, it’s more about making them think than it is about whether their opinion is going to change my mind about anything. I know that they’re not going to be able to play it by Tuesday.

Coy: Can you think of any times in the past two or three years that you allowed student suggestions or opinions to help decide the direction of your class?

Brimmer: Well, I do try to let them have some input on things, but like I said, because I’m steering them. I got a library with hundreds of different songs in it and I pull out what I think or if I want to do something in overture style, with the 7th grade, something in overture style for a concert because I want them to learn overture style, I want them to be able to talk about overture style, and I’ll pull out two or three for them to read. They can choose which one. Which one has the tune they think is catchier or which one is more fun for you to play and I will let them influence me on which song we are going to use but I’m still the one who picked overture style. Same thing with the marches; we pick marches.

One of the things I try to do with the 7th grade each year is make sure they have at least one song that stays slow, just kind of a slow piece. At some point during the year we gotta have something that isn’t all fast energetic marching band kind of stuff, because they need to learn to play slow. It’s a great way to work on phrasing, it’s a great way to work on tonguing, it’s a great way to work on tone development and so we have to work on those slow songs. I’ll give them several choices, but I’m still the person who chose; this is what we are going to do. Does that answer your question?

Coy: Yes, in terms of programming; however, has there been a time where students may grow tired of learning things a certain way or tell you there are new things they would like to do in class?

Brimmer: Yeah, if there is something that they say, such as I have one student who’s in the high school now and ever since he was in 7th grade he’s been talking to me about playing more jazz. He just loves jazz. He’s a saxophone player, wants to play jazz, he was studying with a guy who was a jazz sax player. I get it, he wants to play more jazz. There’s a place for it, and we’ll incorporate jazz as it’s appropriate to our curriculum because we do have content standards we have to follow and part of those content standards includes learning various styles of music, like
blues or whatever, and so that’s certainly appropriate to bring into the class but understand, that’s not the focus of that class. We don’t have a jazz band and we have to incorporate that as a part of everything else we are doing and as its developmentally appropriate. We don’t want to be pulling out…right now the high school is doing *String of Pearls*, you don’t want to pull that out for a 6th, 7th, or 8th grade band because its just not appropriate for them developmentally yet. So with a 7th or an 8th grade band you find some of these nice old John O’Reilly pieces that you know, that just really are designed to introduce swing style.

So yeah, in that sense I have let kids steer me occasionally because there’s so many pieces out there, there’s so many different ways to do something and if we say “you know, we’re really getting tired of doing it that way all the time,” then I’m fine with that.

I’ll give you an example. A number of years ago I had I guess sort of a worksheet that very much mirrored the OMEA contest form that the judges use. We would use that with the kids in class to talk about, ok, we just played this/recorded this now listen back to it, you be the judge. Here’s your comment sheet, here’s what each of those areas is talking about, you know, all the definitions and descriptions and examples are all contained there, and now have them be judges. It wasn’t really about what’s the judge going to give us, it’s about, “we want you to be thinking critically about the music; think critically about the performance. Not just that you are judging yourself,” but eventually you transfer this yourself to other music that you’re listening to. How do you know that you’re listening to a good quality song on the radio or on your mp3 player? Because we all use these same things in terms of tone quality and balance. These are all things that musicians have to deal with whatever the style. And after a few years I could tell that they were getting tired of going through that same routine. It was getting stale. Okay, let’s put it away. We don’t do that anymore and we’ve brought out this guide to musicality. It’s just a different way of looking at music from a critical standpoint. Not just I have to play all those ink spots.

Coy: Can you give me some specifics about the process you use when choosing repertoire for your bands to perform?

Brimmer: Well, one of the advantages that we have now that we didn’t have the first part of my career is that pretty much everything that the publishers put out has the grade level on it and its pretty easy when you’re thinking “oh I think that might be a good song for my 7th-grade band” and you look at it and it says 2.5 right on it and you go “oooh, why is this a 2.5?” Because maybe that isn’t a good piece for my 7th grade, maybe they are not ready for that difficulty level. What is it that makes it a 2.5, is it a technical thing or is it musical things, is it the independence level? So definitely I look at those things even in the older pieces that we have in our library that aren’t graded like you and I talked about this morning. With choosing appropriate literature for our 6th grade, and one of the things that gives them a great sense of security is the block scoring and they need that right now. Let’s face it, they start out in their beginning book playing unison. There’s a reason they start out playing unison, because there’s safety in numbers and you know if you’re playing it right because it’s the same as everybody else, and they need that security blanket in those younger years. As they move on through the 6th grade they get closer to the half-way point they maybe start doing more duets and rounds and maybe even a couple of very
simple band arrangements. There’s still a little bit of security because all the clarinets are still playing the same part but it might be different from what the trumpets are playing.

Then as you move on into the 7th grade you can have things that are a little more intricate. It doesn’t have to be very simple block scoring. Maybe you can have a little more independence and one of the pieces that… one of the things I guess I look for, when I’m looking for 7th grade is I want them to see some independence. It okay if everybody’s playing but if you have a good deal of people playing half note accompaniment and then you have a small group of two instruments or something like that playing a melody line, that helps that group to have a little bit of independence now. I try to find something that gets passed around. You don’t want the trombones to always have to play half notes and whole notes. You don’t want the flutes and trumpets to always have the melody, so you look for things that are going to allow everyone to have some interesting parts, some challenging parts.

As you get farther through 7th grade and on into 8th grade you may look for more stuff that’s going to have extended rests for large groups of students because now you really want to develop more independence. The grading system helps out a lot because you know if you’ve got a grade 1.5 piece, you know what the range of those notes are, you’re not gonna be asking trumpets to play Gs above the staff and they’re not going to be asking clarinets to be going back and forth across the break willy nilly. Not that they won’t cross the break, but the 2nd clarinets probably don’t and the 1st clarinets probably, once they cross, they stay on that side for a while then maybe cross back. So the grade levels help with that but I don’t usually look for those kinds of things. I look more for the ability to develop the independence and then I look for varieties of style. Certainly the most obvious one for bands is marches. That’s our thing. So I make sure that we have marches in our folders, and overture style is fairly common for us. I, myself, am kind of fond of programmatic things so I tend to lean toward those programmatic things. If I’m not careful I get too many of them and that gets too boring for the audience. I’m kind of looking at a program for next week right now, not so much with the middle school but definitely the high school. We’ve got two rather deep programmatic pieces and they’re right back to back and that might be a little much for the audience, but it’s still good for the kids. Just to try to keep them thinking about that there’s this thing and then there’s this next thing, and it just keeps spiraling and then by the time that they’re a senior in high school this isn’t the end of the road, it’s just, I’m going to drop you off here and you’re going to have to get on another bus that’s gonna take you the rest of the way, and that you can keep learning the rest of your life.

**Coy:** Do you plan concerts with specific learning goals in mind?

**Brimmer:** That’s one of the reasons I think repertoire selection is so challenging. There’s so many articles written about it in all of our professional journals because you can’t just say “I’ve got a four year rotation at the high school” or “at the middle school I can use the same stuff every year because it’s a different group of kids every year” because not every group needs the same thing.

A perfect example is earlier in the year, the 8th grade struggled with technique. There are some that are very good and there are a handful who really struggle, especially some brass players,
who don’t understand the idea of partials or didn’t at the beginning of the year, don’t understand key signatures, and I knew that I needed to pick something and it just so happened it was baritones and trombones that were having this problem. I knew I needed to pick music that had unison parts for them so I wasn’t trying to get a first trombone, a second trombone, and a baritone, I knew I wasn’t going to be able to get them all to do that. I was looking for pieces specifically for them that would be unison so that they can get that comfort zone and hopefully through that we can teach them, okay, lets understand these partials. One of you went up and one of you went down. Some of you are playing an Eb and some of you are playing an E natural – and help them to figure that out. Whereas with the 7th grade, I wasn’t concerned about that at all. They don’t have that problem and so with them I was looking for other things specific to their group and I guess more along the lines of what I would normally do with the 7th grade, things that would expand their horizons musically. They know all the modern music. They had a little exposure last year to some programmatic things, some exposure to marches, and a little bit of overture style. So early in the year it’s like “let’s do some overture style, let’s do a march and now they’re doing a piece, it’s a programmatic piece called *Echoes of the Civil War* but its got a lot more independence. It starts with just a clarinet melody and a flute countermelody and then it adds in the sax and horns just to go along with it, then it does a little drum thing. The idea was not that I was trying to get a programmatic piece but something where they had to do that counting of the extended rests, how do I connect that group to the next group, making transitions, and things like that.

So yeah, I have to look at that every single year and with every single piece. What is it that I want them to learn? What don’t they have that I need to give them so they can get to the next step?

The challenge with the 8th grade was I had these weak low brass players and I had these really strong woodwinds. So the challenge is trying to find something that is going to challenge those woodwinds enough that they are not bored without making it so hard that the brass players can’t keep up. That’s the toughest balance.

Coy: Since you mentioned programmatic music, do you sometimes choose music for its programmatic values?

Brimmer: That’s a tough one, because I think that sometimes I lean one way and sometimes I lean another. Certainly if you were…if I had known that *Titanic* was going to be re-released in 3D here, I may have been inclined to say, “I wonder if we have some music from *Titanic* that maybe we could be working on” because it’s historical and it would be programmatic. As a matter of fact we have a piece called *Carpathia* that is the name of the ship that got there to rescue people first, and we did that last year with a group. But maybe you would be inclined to do that with a group because then you could tie it in with something that the kids are familiar with; it’s a movie, it’s a historical thing and you might need to make a cross-cultural connection for them with something like that. The 8th grade is doing a piece call *The Rowan Tree*, and its based on an old poem from…I think the poem goes back at least into the renaissance era at some point. I don’t remember exactly where it came from, but then there is this nice little tune that somebody put to it. Part of that is just…in that case, I want them to have the flavor of not all
music just goes “boom-chunk-boom-chunk.” It’s a slower, more flowing, more lyrical piece and it just lends itself to more style kinds of things. But in this case, they get a flavor of it. Some kids, they will listen to that and play it and say, “I just don’t really like that kind of music” and other kids might say “wow I never realized we could be so expressive,” you know, with something that really isn’t musically challenging. There aren’t many technical challenges; there’s nothing faster than an 8th note in there and maybe there’s a lot more challenges than what looks to be easy music on paper.

Exit Interview

Coy: How many years accrued between your bachelors and master’s degrees and what type of professional or other experiences did you have during that time?

Brimmer: There was about 12 years between the two. I got my bachelors in ’82 and I got my master’s in, I’m pretty sure it was ’94. It might have been ’95, I honestly don’t remember. Because there’s a lot of things that just are not important to me and those dates are not always that important.

The first couple years after my bachelor’s degree I was not able to find a teaching job, and so I was working in private industry. Then I started subbing the next year just so I could get my name out there, get my foot in the door, and then it would eventually lead to a job where I was the band director at Cardinal Stritch High School, and I was there for four years and I was responsible for the elementary feeder program in the local catholic elementary schools and the high school. I also toyed with some things around that time, you know, trying to find a niche. Do I want to be a composer, do I want to be a performer, and just playing around trying to see where I really thought I fit in because teaching was hard to get into. Maybe I wanted to own a music store. Maybe I was more inclined to be in music business. So I explored a lot of those things but I’m glad that I eventually ended up getting the teaching job because I found out that this is what I really want to do, this is what I really enjoy, you know. At first I wasn’t making any money being a young person teaching in a private school.

Coy: So what made you settle on the teaching aspect?

Brimmer: I think it’s the joy of watching the kids’ progress. They don’t see it half the time, they don’t see it happening, but when you hand that 5th grader an instrument and you show them how to put it together, it’s all magical to them, and when they make that first awful sound on the instrument, and they just think it’s the greatest thing in the world and over the course of a year, you hear how much they refine that sound and you see how much more musical they become. Especially that first year, it’s just so rewarding because they’re having so much fun and you’re watching that growth. That to me was worth more than any of the money I ever made.

Coy: In what ways have standards for music education, both national and state, affected your teaching? Begin by telling me when the standards first affected how you teach.
**Brimmer:** I think it’s a great question because originally when I first started teaching, as most of us do, we teach the way we were taught. So I was just trying to mimic what I saw my high school band directors do and I just thought that’s what I was supposed to do. Of course as a student, you don’t see everything that goes into the preparation and so I maybe wasn’t doing a lot of that stuff. Then, in the late 1980s, all of a sudden, MENC came out with this thing called voluntary national standards and I was looking at that saying, singing in band? That makes no sense whatsoever. Composing and arranging? We don’t have time to do that. Improvising? That’s if you’ve got a jazz band. You know, including stuff from other curricular areas, the arts and even the other…math and science. I thought there was no place for that in band. Why would I? I don’t have time to do that. I gotta get ready for a concert, a parade, or football game.

But, the more I kept hearing about those things, and of course now at that point you’re starting to see a lot of literature pop up in the professional journals about how you could implement these types of things and realized, oh it really wouldn’t be that hard to include some of this stuff in my classroom. I guess just since then it’s been more of a constant. I’m always looking for, OK, what is it I’m still not doing enough of and how do I incorporate that into my class? You do still have to think about, I’ve got a concert coming up, I’ve got a parade, and you still have to be ready for that so you can’t just ignore it, we have to, you know, work on our performance literature, but what you find is, how do I use my performance literature to teach these other things. To include things like evaluation, analyze your own product, listening to a recording of another group doing that same piece of music and now listening to a recording of yourselves and making those comparisons and trying to get those kids into the higher order thinking skills, and the more I did it, the more effective I became as a teacher. The better my programs were becoming, the kids were just performing better and at that point I said, I was crazy never to do this. It just, this is what leads you to have a really stellar band program where the kids play really well. But more importantly, it makes those kids better musicians and the thing that I’ve said to them since the first day I started teaching is, I don’t want to teach you just how to play songs. I want you to learn how to play music because then you can enjoy it for the rest of your life. If you just learn to play songs, you’re done the minute you stop going to school.

**Coy:** How do you hope students will have changed musically, and as human beings, as a result of your teaching?

**Brimmer:** Most kids now coming into my band program…they’ve got a really good general music program here, and so they’re exposed to a lot of different things, not just performance, but they’re exposed to listening to music from a lot of different cultures, and things like that. So when they come to me, I don’t feel like I have to expose them to everything all at once. When they leave, my hope is that they say, “I might not choose to listen to this particular kind of music,” whatever that may be. Maybe they really don’t like jazz, maybe they don’t really want to play the old rock and roll tunes, or maybe they don’t like playing concert band literature. But they have an appreciation for what it takes to be able to produce those products, in whatever venue it is. If it’s a rock band, if it’s a choir, or if it’s just a bunch of guys standing on a street corner playing guitars, they have an appreciation for how hard the people have to work in order to be able to do what we’re doing in here. When they develop that appreciation for the amount of effort that goes into it, then they’re more likely to act on that.
Let me make a comparison. In the sports world we look at some of these athletes and they’re tall and very big and strong and they have great athletic skills and that’s why they are great athletes. That certainly leads them towards being better athletes but the fact of that matter is that they still had to work at their craft. It’s still hard to throw a ball through a hoop. It’s still hard to, you know, throw a football and hit a moving target, that’s 50 yards away. So although they may have some physical attributes that lead them to that, they still had to work very hard to be able to do this at this level. Kids understand sports better than they understand music. If they’re forced to, I shouldn’t say forced…If they are able to go through that process themselves as musicians, they develop an appreciation for it and now they’re not as likely to just say things like “I hate opera.” I don’t choose to listen to opera is a better way of expressing it. I don’t enjoy listening to music that I don’t understand because it’s sung in a foreign language. Those are intelligent comments. Ok, would you like it if it was sung in English? Maybe so. Would you like it if the music was in a different style, as opposed to, you know, some of the classical style operas? You know that very structured style of music. Would you like it if it was more free flowing like you see in some of the more modern musical type things? I don’t hate anything, but I maybe choose not to listen to it for various reasons.

My whole goal is to make them more thinkers. That’s not a good way to say that. Make them think more, as opposed to just “knee jerk” reactions.

Coy: What effect do you think comprehensive musicianship has on that?

Brimmer: A lot better than when I started out teaching, which was here’s how to play the notes, and it says to crescendo so we do and it says to articulate a certain way so we do and there we go. We did everything it said on the paper and we got all the ink spots right so therefore it’s a good performance. Well no, it’s a right performance, it’s an accurate performance, but it’s not a good performance. What do you have to do to make it good? You have to understand what the composer meant when he said get louder. Why did the composer choose to use accents there? If you get into the mind of the composer, then you can say, “oh, he’s trying to express this.”

I’ll give you a perfect example. We had our concert on Tuesday night and one of the pieces that the 7th-grade band did was a programmatic piece about Mayan culture. It had a lot of unusual harmonies and things like that. Things that were very strange to 7th-graders. They thought it was kind of a weird sounding piece but they liked it. The high school band, on the same program, did a similar sort of a piece but it was just called Roswell 1947 and it’s depicting some sort of an alien presence or an invasion, however you want to hear the music. I’ve had two different junior high kids since Tuesday night that said, one of them said, “I had a dream Tuesday night about aliens because of that song” and another one said he had a nightmare about aliens because of that song. The song elicits an emotional response because they know it’s not just ink spots on a page. What was the composer trying to say? That’s what we are trying to communicate. I can tell the high school band, you did a good job communicating that because these people had an emotional response. Without the comprehensive musicianship, it’s just ink spots.
Coy: Starting with your 6th grade band, what methods of assessment do you use, and do you prefer one method of assessment over another?

Brimmer: I like to use a lot of conversation. Just conversation in class, asking for them to respond and sometimes those responses, especially when you have a large class, if you’ve got 50-60 kids in a room and you say, what do you think about that? Twenty hands go up and after about five kids say what they think, the rest of them aren’t listening anymore; so you’ve lost the class and you’ve lost the flow and it doesn’t really help. Sometimes what I will do is, “what do you think is the best way to perform this particular section? Demonstrate that for me right now.” Have them play it as a group. Okay, what would happen if we would do something a little different; say, take all the slurs out. Let’s play it once without the slurs. Do we like that better? Or is it not as good? Why do you think the slurs are written in there? What’s that supposed to do? Those kinds of things. Now, everyone is still actively engaged. I’m not giving anybody a chance to respond verbally; they are responding with their instruments. Okay, you can play it now, the way you think the composer intended it. Just by doing that, you can get responses from everybody. There are times when we will take individual responses on something.

If I were to say, what’s the point of the composer using the accidental in this measure? How is that accidental…what does that add to the music? They don’t understand things like secondary dominants yet, which is probably what it is, or it might just be we are trying to create an eerie kind of a sound; but we get that conversation from them. What is it that they think we are trying to do? Is it important? Maybe we should leave it out. Or, if it…we did a piece last year with the 6th grade band called Invasion of the Garden Gnomes. It had a lot of little eerie type sounds in it and it led to a discussion of, why is it supposed to be played this way? Why those notes, why those articulations and what if we did it without them? And we have those discussions. The key to that is you have to find the kids that don’t respond. I noticed one of the survey questions was do you always raise your hand, do you never raise your hand. Raising your hand has nothing to do with why I call on you. I, a lot of times, will call on the kid who doesn’t raise their hand and I say “I haven’t heard from you lately and I think your opinion’s important. What do you think?” You draw all of them in so as far as assessment, a lot of times I like to just use, I’m having a conversation with the kids or I’m asking them to demonstrate through their performance, those kinds of things, so I’m listening, observing.

Depending on the grade level there are other forms of assessment. With the 6th-grade we do more of what I guess I would call live assessment, such as a playing test. Here is a piece of music, you have to play for a test, ok ready, go! They play through it and you’re making an assessment. We have a rubric we use while they play a song and we say ok here are the things we are going to be listening for. Are you in the right key signature, are you keeping a steady beat, are you doing the dynamic contrast, or whatever the focus is for those pieces. We have a rubric and we score them according to that rubric.

With the, the 7th and 8th-grade we use a different rubric maybe, but essentially it’s the same thing. We will ask them to perform something that they have been preparing and then we use that rubric to score them based on how their tone quality is and whatever else is on that rubric. My preferred method of assessment is probably the one that’s not graded. It’s the one that I do every
day because that’s the one that… I know this leads into one of the other questions I know you were going to ask about formative vs. summative assessments. You have to do a certain amount of summative assessments because parents want to know: what did my kid do to earn that grade? But the formative assessments are the ones that tell you, what do I need to do tomorrow? What is it that they still don’t understand? I probably do a lot more of the formative kind because it informs me of how to proceed next.

Coy: There is an educational philosophy, commonly referred to as “teach to the top.” What are your feelings regarding this?

Brimmer: I think that’s true, you certainly have to challenge those kids that are more… if you’re naturally inclined to music, as Howard Gardner would say, you’ve got high musical intelligence, you’re going to get the easy stuff right away and you have to challenge those kids. The more you challenge those kids and raise them up, they can bring the rest of them with them. The rest of them maybe don’t always understand what it is that they’re doing, right away, but they’re kind of getting carried by the tide; whereas, if you’re only focusing on, I have to teach to the last kid, the last chair in every section, the rest of them are bored and they don’t aspire to do any more, I’m already doing good enough. That’s one of my arguments against all of the state tests and everything. If what we’re doing is, we’re working toward proficiency, then since when is good enough, good enough? Why are we not working towards mastery? Why are we not working towards… understanding that some kids are only ever going to be proficient, maybe not even that. But we should always be working towards mastery, and push everyone towards that goal. The higher you set the goal, the higher they aspire to get. If they don’t reach the goal, that’s okay.

Coy: How do you balance challenging gifted students, with teaching students who are having difficulty?

Brimmer: There’s the huge challenge, I think, that faces band directors, at least in my opinion more so most teachers, because even in a 7th-grade band we’re not teaching one lesson. Because you’re teaching a flute lesson and a clarinet lesson that maybe has two different lessons because you have a first part and a second part and you’re really… each different instrument kind of has its own separate lesson because you have to stop and talk about trumpet tone quality that doesn’t necessarily apply to anybody else in the room. You have to stop and talk to that timpani player about how to tune. That’s not going to apply to anybody else in the room. Now, within your clarinet section you have to challenge the kid that sits first chair and just took a nice solo to solo and ensemble contest and got the top rating, and the person who sits in last chair who sometimes still doesn’t understand why it’s Bb or B natural. We’re really teaching almost individual lessons. If you’ve got 50 kids in band, you’ve got 50 different lessons going on simultaneously and it’s really a juggling act. It really is, because you can’t spend the entire class period on any one section or any one student or whomever. You have to keep flipping from, okay here’s what the first chair clarinet player needs to hear now and here’s what my 3rd chair trombone player needs to hear now and you just have to keep bouncing around the room. Here’s what you have to do, it’s tough. You have to monitor what each kid needs in any given moment and then try to give it to them. Sometimes I’m successful and a lot of times I feel like I’m not. But really, you’re
trying to balance a lot of different things all at the same time and it’s a super challenge. I know I’m a lot better at it now than I used to be and I feel bad for the kids that had me as a teacher early on!

Coy: How often do you formally assess and grade your students?

Brimmer: With 6th-grade, we start off doing a lot of assessments, but they are very small projects. It might be a very short written exercise. One of the first ones they had to do in their book is, it’s just simply, do I need to add a half note to make this a full measure, or do I need to add a quarter note, or a whole note? That’s all they have to do and it’s a real short, you know, do you understand note values kind of an assignment. If you have a playing test, and it’s a short four measure song because it’s very early in the year and it’s just to assess if they know the notes and the fingerings. As we get older, it tends to get more like once a quarter, where I will either record them in class or I’ll listen to them individually for an audition type thing. Then I use one of those larger rubrics that we were talking about, but generally for something like that it comes out to be once a quarter. I have so many students that it’s just too hard to manage any more than that.

Coy: How much experience do you have with student teachers, and how do you hope to have influenced them after having you as their mentor?

Brimmer: I’ve had nine over my career. I actually went and looked that up when I knew you were going to ask that question. Again, I’m much better at it now than I was before. I very distinctly remember my first student teacher. She was a bassoon player, was a very fine musician and had a nice rapport with the students, but really did not understand how to present material to students in a way that they could understand. She was talking like she was talking to a room full of college students. It was a real challenge for her to interact with the middle school. She just...she threw out words that are very common to you and I, as you saw in today’s class, just talking to the 6th-grade about dynamics. Some of them still don’t know what that word means and she would throw around musical terms like that as if everyone knew what she was talking about, not understanding that they didn’t. That became the focus of our interactions after classes. I would try to say and point out to her, “here are things that you’re saying that don’t mean anything to them, because you’re talking calculus and they don’t understand algebra.”

As I got more and more experience with having student teachers, I was much better able to focus on their presentation style and their classroom management issues and I guess what I didn’t realize was that some of those early student teachers...it wasn’t just that the students didn’t understand what they were talking about because every student teacher comes out like they are talking to college students, because it’s just normal. One of the things we find is real common with student teachers is they don’t have classroom management skills, because when you’re dealing with...when you’re practicing in front of your peers who are pretending to be 5th-graders at the university level and the kid talks out because he was prompted, that when we get this far into the lesson you are going to act out so the teacher has to get you reprimanded or whatever, that’s not the same as when the kids do it. So their classroom management skills get in the way and a lot of times they are so focused on, “I’ve got step four, I’ve got to get to step 5 and step 6,” and they don’t even realize that the kids aren’t learning. So that has become a lot of the focus.
That’s where I work mostly with my student teachers. A vast majority of my student teachers have come from Bowling Green, they got a great music college there and I have never had a problem with a student coming from Bowling Green and not knowing their music, not knowing their teaching methods. I do sometimes try to encourage them to find other ways to say things because they just don’t have a lot of tools in the tool box yet.

I remember one young man who was student teaching and he made the comment to me that, “I need to come up with more analogies. I need to come up with more great stories. You have great stories and the kids listen and when they’re listening to your stories you can see the light bulb go on. ‘Oh, now I get it.’” So that’s the stuff that I usually tend to focus on more with my student teachers is, finding more than one way to say whatever it is they are trying to teach, not being afraid to tell stories, but keep the classroom under control because if they aren’t listening to you then it doesn’t matter how great your story is.

I will say that with a lot of the student teachers that I’ve had coming from Bowling Green, I don’t have to spend a lot of time on musicianship and they maybe don’t even know what its called, because we realize that comprehensive musicianship has been around for 40 years and people just don’t know…they don’t have the label for it, but they’re doing it. What I usually end up doing with a student teacher is, they will be frustrated because I’m trying to get the kids to understand whatever the concept is, whether it’s, play Maestoso. I’m trying to get them to really, really play the note the right style. Okay, maybe what you need to do is bring in some music for them to listen to that’s played in that style. Maybe I don’t have a recording of this song, but that’s okay. As long as you play any song that’s played in that style, it will work. Or maybe you can make a comparison between how the music sounds and something else that they would be familiar with. Maestoso style; maybe you can make a correlation between that and watching a group of army soldiers marching down the road. Nice straight lines and everybody’s feet going the same way, at the same time or something like that. Maybe you can find some type of sports analogy because kids love sports. They get sports. Maybe you just need to, for whatever the concept is, maybe you can draw a picture of it. I’m a terrible artist, but I like to draw a picture of a house and a tree on the board, and I usually have the wrong color marker and it’s a very sketchy, 2nd grade level house and tree. I say, “that’s my artwork, what do you think of it? Now how can I make it better? How does that apply to your music?” Comprehensive musicianship…bringing in the other arts and things like that. I’ll be honest; one of the things that I don’t do well enough yet is improvisation. I’m only starting to work more and get better at incorporating composing and arranging. Maybe before I retire I’ll get good at that. But I guess the thing that has been my focus for the last few years has been trying to incorporate the other arts and incorporate other disciplines outside the arts and make them relevant to what we are doing in class.

Coy: Who is one music education philosopher who has had a significant impact on your teaching?

Brimmer: Anybody who says that Bennett Reimer has not been an influence one way or the other hasn’t been paying attention. I don’t agree with everything that he says but I do remember that the first time I was exposed to Bennett Reimer and his writings and I remember thinking,
that’s a nice philosophy for somebody who sits in an ivory tower. That’s not the real world. You can’t just teach music for the sake of music because the reality is the football coach at OSU makes a million dollars or more, the president of the university makes a fifth of that, and the band director makes a fifth of that. So if you’re just going to teach music for music’s sake you’re gonna take the chance in this world that your program’s going to be cut. You have to make it more than just for the music. You have to show that it’s supportive of the student as a whole, as a person. We want them to be able to do more than play their instruments; we have to take it further than that. But he’s probably not the most influential for me.

I can get a lot of brownie points if I say Dr. Kantorski was one of my big influences and he was. He was; when I got my master’s degree he taught all of the core classes that I was in and he’s the person who got me thinking about comprehensive musicianship. He’s the person that got me thinking about…who introduced me to Bennett Reimer and Michael Mark and a lot of these people who have put a lot of time, thought, and effort into what we are doing here.

More recently, the person who I’ve been trying to model myself after is Peter Boonshaft. I’m just amazed every time I hear him speak, every time I see him work with a group, and what he’s about to get from them. I think those are the same things I’m trying to get from my students too. What is it that he’s doing that I’m not able to do for whatever reason, and that’s where I get some of my silly jokes and some of those things we were talking about earlier. We’re going to play the loudest sound you’ve ever played in your life, but then when we actually get there we only let them play mezzo-piano. Those little tricks that coax the kids to do whatever we are trying to get them to do because no matter how many times you try to get them to play softer, they don’t play softer.