



Democracy in Action: Student Experiences and Perceptions of the Conductor-less Concert Band

Background

Conductor-less ensembles (CE), such as the Orpheus Ensemble, utilize a democratic approach where the members of the ensemble share responsibilities for rehearsal planning and execution that are typically done by the conductor. This approach represents one model for increased student responsibility advocated for by Allsup & Benedict (2008), Miksza (2013), Morrison & Demorest (2012), and others. Relatively little research has considered how this model is received by students and might be used in pre-professional settings.

Methodology

- Butler University Symphonic Band utilizes a CE model for one piece per concert throughout the 2018-19 academic year
- Data collection
 - Video recording of rehearsals/performances
 - Interviews with 23% of student-participants
 - Analytical memos by researcher and four student assistants
- Analysis
 - In vivo and process coding of interviews
 - Rehearsal frame analysis of videos for rehearsal activities
 - Role analysis of videos for individuals' contributions to rehearsal management

Stage 2: Individuals and Basics

- Individuals arise as decision-makers
- Strategic discussions focused on basic issues (e.g. rhythm/note accuracy)
- Focus on multiple phrases with each practice frame
- Visible displays of frustration, anger, and disappointment

Stage 1: Novice Uncertainty

- Run-throughs
- Slow progress, with lots of talking but little strategy usage
- Little deep analysis or use of resources
- Focus on localized issues (e.g. specific measures, individual sections, etc.)

Stage 3:

Rule Making and Strategizing

- Differentiated responsibilities begin to form
- Policies and protocols are developed by members for decision-making
- Increasingly sophisticated strategy usage
- More focused attention on details beyond accuracy

Moving Forward

The participants have changed the way that they function in the CE with greater time in the ensemble. Several key questions remain:

- How do new members of the ensemble acclimate to CE rehearsal?
- What are the critical strategies necessary for effectively working in a CE setting?
- Does rehearsing in a CE change the way students interact with music in traditional settings?