Teaching creative music:
A case-study and action research examination of practices in creative music making

by

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ABSTRACT

Many scholars agree that creative music making can facilitate student agency development, increase a sense of belonging and foster creative expression. Creative music making allows students to bring their perspectives to the learning context through their own creations and explorations. In my own teaching practice, I have had difficulty implementing creative music making in a community music setting. Using a two-phase approach of multiple qualitative case studies, and action research, I examined teachers’ perspectives of creative music making, and ways I can improve my own teaching of creative music making. Findings revealed that teachers’ experiences with creative music making in their own music education played a crucial role in preparing them to teach creative music. Instructors conceptualized creative music making as activities that develop people’s agency through collaborative music creation, that have the benefit of creating a sense of belonging, while giving students the opportunity to contribute to their community. The implementation of creative music making seems to rely on connecting students to their wider community, which is achieved in part through incorporating their own musical tastes and experiences. Instructors indicated that balancing the learning goals of technical development with creative music making and exploration was an ongoing challenge.
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To mom, Keely, Georgia: You women rock!
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Chapter One

Topic and Problem

Creative music making offers potential for developing student agency (Burnard & Dragovic 2014; Campbell, 2009; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Hickey, 2009; Hickey, 2015). Contributors to the agency development of students include equitable teacher-student relationships, integrated student leadership, and shared decision making (Kirk, Lewis, Brown, Karibo, Scott & Park, 2017). Creative music making creates learning opportunities that enhance the students’ sense of agency and awareness within their social setting (Loizou & Charalambous, 2017).

Creative music making can contribute to students’ sense of agency by allowing them to bring their perspectives to the learning context through their own creations and explorations. While research is mounting regarding the potential of creative music making for developing empathy, social awareness and community building, music education theory has been slow to recognize the potential of music creativity to facilitate students socially and politically in educational settings (Lapidaki, De Groot, & Stagkos, 2012).

As students engage in creative music making, students not only gain trust in their musical capacity, but also trust in themselves—that they can contribute something meaningful, at any time, and any place (Spalding, 2017). By revealing themselves and their relationships with others through creative music making, students have the opportunity to explore and develop social awareness, conceived as perspective-taking, empathy and respect for others (Müller, Naples, Cannon, Haffner, & Mullins, 2019). Elliott and Silverman (2015) conceptualize music making as a particular form of action, that is purposeful and situated, revealing one’s self, and one’s relationship with others in a community. They explain:
Music (as products and processes) ought to be understood in relation to meanings and values revealed in actual music making, music listening, and musical outcomes in specific cultural contexts (p. 14).

Through creative exploration, students take risks and make mistakes to navigate what sounds engaging to them. Characterized as behavior inhibition, or, negative reactivity and avoidance to novelty, a preoccupation with making mistakes can eventually lead children to experience heightened social anxiety later in life (Buzzell, Troller-Renfree, Barker, Bowman, Chronis-Tuscano, & Henderson, 2017). By allowing a safe, exploratory atmosphere of creative music making, students learn to navigate making mistakes, and engage in collective learning and shared problem solving (Stanyek, 2000, as cited by Lewis, 2000).

The potential benefits of creative music making are significant. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to explore creative music making with a view to maximizing its potential to support student agency, self-expression, and social awareness.

In my own teaching practice, I have had difficulty implementing creative music making in a music education setting. The writing and research on creative music education is sporadic, however, many music education experts and researchers conclude that creative music making is important not only in the musical development of students, but also their overall learning and development (Burnard, 2006; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Feldman, 2008; Higgins & Willingham, 2017; Schafer, 1978). Creative music making contrasts traditional music education curricula, which focuses on performance and very little on creation. These traditional approaches have centuries of writing, research and methods for educators to implement in their teaching. Creative music education, in comparison, is a relatively new field. While a growing body of research has examined creative music education in formal music education settings (e.g., Beineke, 2013;
relatively little research has examined creative music education in community music settings.

(Burnard & Dragovic, 2014). Research is needed that illustrates how creative music making can be incorporated into music education programming in classroom and community contexts.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine how music educators incorporate creative music curriculum into their programmes, and then to identify effective ways that I could incorporate creative music into my own community music programme that gives students opportunities for agency, self-expression, and social awareness. The study’s focus was on creative music making in community music settings, but not community music as a concept. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are instructors prepared to teach creative music making?
2. How do instructors conceptualize creative music making?
3. What do instructors think are the benefits of creative music making?
4. How do instructors implement creative music making into their curriculum?
5. As I work to infuse creative music making into my own context of a strings-based community music programme for elementary-aged students,
   a. How do I incorporate creative music making?
   b. How do students experience creative music making?
   c. How does creative music making fit within the existing music learning of a community music programme?

I addressed these questions in two phases through multiple case study methods (research questions one through four), followed by action research (research question five). Initially, using
a multiple case study method, I examined four community music programmes. In particular, I looked at the ways in which educators define, and students engage in, creative music making. I gathered data using interviews with educators and in-class observations. Within and cross-case analyses provided answers to the research questions and implications for my own practice that I implemented and examined in phase two of the project where I adopted and applied creative music making practices within a community music programme in Kingston, Ontario. Using an action research method—including journals, observation, and reflective analysis—I developed a descriptive narrative of my experience as instructor.

**Conceptual Framework**

The study is rooted in two conceptual frameworks: Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice, and Small’s (1998) musicking. I relate these two frameworks to a conceptualization of creative music making, which I used to frame the study.

**Communities of Practice**

According to Wenger (1998), a community of practice is formed by a group of people collectively involved in a common activity that requires members to engage in continuous negotiation in pursuing their objectives. Wenger sees any group of people who share an activity that requires a collective effort as a community of practice because in the common activity the members of the group develop practices that allow them to act in a coordinated manner, which better places them to achieve their collective objectives. Groups of people engaged in musical practice tend to forge their practices together (Reily & Brucher, 2018). For this reason, they form a community of practice.

Wenger (1998) and later Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) identified a framework for identifying communities of practice. Though no two communities of practice are exactly
alike, all have characteristics in common: a joint enterprise, shared repertoire, mutual engagement, multi-membership, and brokering.

_Joint enterprise._ A community of practice can be: a culture striving to preserve its traditions, a group of scientists searching for a solution to a problem, a group of friends jointly developing their skateboarding, a band trying to make it as professional musicians (Reily & Brucher, 2018). These are all examples of what Wenger describes as a joint enterprise.

_Shared repertoire._ The shared repertoire among a community of practice includes routines, symbols, concepts, and actions. Two communities can be part of the same broad system, yet the shared repertoire for each community can be different. For example, music education (the system) in different schools (the community) can use different music education methodologies (the shared repertoire).

_Mutual engagement._ Communities of practice are composed of individuals with different expertise, who are mutually engaged while pursuing their goal. Mutual engagement, “being included in what matters” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74), is as much a matter of diversity as of homogeneity because communities of practice require the “contributions and knowledge of others” (p. 76), and can be characterized by harmony or “tensions and conflicts” (p. 77).

_Multi-membership._ According to Wenger (1998), communities of practice exist in all aspects of daily living, and members belong to several communities of practice at once through multi-membership. Members’ identities are formed through multi-membership, and communities take shape through participation. Communities can be related to one another, and often overlap through membership, practices, or tools used in each.

_Brokering._ Individuals can serve at the periphery of multiple communities as brokers who translate and connect practice to the activity.
As Wenger explains, communities of practice exist in all aspects of life. In music making, one way a community of practice materializes is through *musicking*.

**Musicking**

Small’s (1998) concept of musicking represents a prominent theoretical understanding of music and its role in society. Small coined the term “musicking” to emphasize music as active and participatory in nature. To Small “music is not primarily a thing or a collection of things, but an activity in which we engage” (1987, p. 50). This activity encompasses all things musical:

- To music is to take part in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composition), or by dancing. (Small 1998, p. 9)

Musicking creates a web of relationships between and among musical sounds and people situated in the physical and cultural space of musicking (Small, 1998). Observing these relationships makes it possible to understand the society in which music is created (Odendaal, Kankkunen, Nikkanen, & Vakeva, 2014).

For Small, musicking is also a means “by which we explore our inner and outer environments, and learn to live in them” (1977, p. 3). In musicking, we are exploring, affirming and celebrating who we are in relation to fellow humans and to the world (Small, 1987). Musicking, then, can be seen as educative process in the sense that those who engage in musicking learn new things of themselves and of the contexts in which they music (Odendaal et al., 2014).

**Creative Music Making**

Creative music making (CMM) is often conceptualized as music activities that place creativity in the forefront of music making (Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Hickey & Lipscomb,
2006; Paynter, 1970; Schafer, 1976; Tafuri, 2006). CMM may emerge in any musical activity, but it appears that composition and improvisation are the ones with the most potential for its development (Odena, 2018). To define CMM for this study, I examine subthemes of musicking and CMM, creativity and CMM, CMM and music education, and CMM as group activity.

Musicking and CMM. Higgins and Campbell (2010) explain that CMM activities have musicking potential, as they enable people to have “the capacity to participate in the socially interactive process of making music” (p. 1). Musicking frames music making as not necessarily about the product, but about engagement in the process, and the relationships that music making brings. Small (1998) explains:

We learn, from the sounds and from one another, the nature of the relationships; in affirming we teach one another about the relationships; and in celebrating we bring together the teaching and the learning in an act of social solidarity (p. 218).

To many researchers (e.g., Alperson, 1991; Bowman, 2002; Elliot and Silverman, 2015; Martin, 2009; Regelski, 1996), the processes and products of CMM are inseparable from the contexts and community of individuals in which they are situated. In order to allow these contexts and the free exchange of creative ideas to flourish among students, a safe, comfortable, and enabling space must be created. Creative music making frequently finds itself being employed in non-formal education environments, or, what was previously described as community music spaces (Higgins, 2012).

Creativity and CMM. For this study, creative music making is conceptualized alongside the broader concept of creativity, and both are viewed through a social-constructivist lens. Thus, creativity and CMM depend on the interaction of cultural and social factors that interact in the formation of self-identity (Burnard, 2006); the community, or, the social context in which
creativity, creative products, and creative processes emerge (Higgins & Willingham, 2017); the range of cultural practices, interaction, and relationships between individuals and their social environments (Allsup, 2004); and the beliefs and meanings attributed by individuals to musical creativity (Elliott & Silverman, 2015).

*CMM and music education.* Creativity, especially in the arts, has “a deeply entrenched mythology, whereby it is construed as a mysterious, unknowable process” (Williamson, Thompson, Lisboa, & Wiffen, p. 164). R. Murray Schafer describes music as predominantly an expressive subject, like art, creative writing, or making of all kinds.

That is, it ought to be this, though with heavy emphasis on theory, technique and memory work, it becomes predominantly knowledge-gaining. (p. 228)

Schafer describes how creativity in music education gets lost in the pursuit of understanding the aesthetic qualities of musical works—those objects which are formed by this “mysterious process.” Unravelling creativity from musical knowledge-gaining involves placing the creative process forefront, in particular its potential for people to learn about and express themselves. Bolden (2014) agrees, stating that “positioning creative work such as composing at the heart of music education curricula . . . firmly places students at the centre of their own music learning. It allows them to hear and share their own voices” (p. 3). Elliott and Silverman (2015) make an important observation with regards to creativity in music. Rather than asking “what is it?” relegating creativity to an act in the past, or an object, they ask “what can it do?” This distinction is essential to place creativity as an action-oriented, praxial-based phenomenon with potential for expression and communication, as opposed to an aesthetic, static object.

Several scholars argue for the inclusion of CMM in formal music curricula, as it can be used to enhance musical aptitude. Campbell (2009) argues that CMM activities such as
improvisation provide the opportunity for formal musical concepts to be taught while contextualized within active experiences. She explains that “[m]ore than any other experience, improvisation as an instructional technique allows music students to receive holistic musical training in which music theory, ear training, and performance can be woven together in an information-rich context” (p. 133).

Campbell’s statement has the potential to reduce CMM as a tool for theory, training and performance. Though it misses the point of the full potential of CMM (as a tool for learners to learn about, and express themselves), the author makes a distinction that one must still learn how to play music in general in order to experience rewarding CMM activities. Higgins & Mantie (2013) also indicate the potential of CMM to enhance musical ability and that improvisation as a form of CMM be emphasized in music education. The authors expand the scope of improvisation’s potential and state that improvisation is a component of a holistic view of musicianship (i.e., ability), an aspect of a situated form of musical practice (i.e., culture), and a distinct way of being in the world, embodying such qualities as risk-taking, reflexivity, spontaneity, exploration, participation, and play (i.e., experience). The latter point, the authors conclude, “provides the greatest educative potential and the greatest potential to positively influence American society” (p. 39).

Improvisation is a powerful form of CMM, because it emphasizes dynamic musical interaction between individuals in real-time. Group activity is another defining characteristic of CMM, mainly materializing in improvisation.

**CMM as group activity.** Sawyer (1999) views improvisation as fundamentally a group activity that, when taught in this way, promotes the learning of “collaboration, group problem-solving, and collective creativity” (p. 193). Martin (2009) explains that a central feature of group
improvisation is reflection-in-action and the capacity to respond to another’s impulse in order to maintain musical coherence and continuity. He continues:

This also requires time and effort to develop; it is not simply a matter of ‘follow the leader’ or ‘question and answer.’ It is a dynamic process in which musical roles constantly switch among members according to the needs of the moment (p. 171).

**How the conceptual framework informed the research.** By framing the concept of creative music making within musicking, and communities of practice, I was able to guide the various stages of my research study. For example, I identified the participants and program sites to conduct my research by selecting music programs based on concepts of communities of practice. I oriented my analysis of my observations and interviews toward concepts of musicking.

**Role of the Researcher**

I began my musical career at an early age. My mother was teaching piano and employed as a church organist as I was growing up, and she encouraged me to pursue music. Opposing the idea of taking piano lessons from my mom, as kids are apt to do, I decided to take guitar lessons from a colleague of my mother. When I got to high school, the music department offered a typical band instrumental programme where I took up the trombone and continued with it throughout high school. The band programme focused on western classical instrumental music, and emphasized technical development above musical exploration. Like most adolescents, my musical discoveries in high school were very formative. I discovered the music of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Charles Mingus and Thelonious Monk—cementing my love of jazz and improvised music. I then pursued a jazz performance degree and continued playing after my undergraduate career.
One of my first realizations in the “real-world” was that many musicians trained in the dominant Western art music tradition did not feel comfortable creating their own music—they did not even believe they had the ability. Anecdotes from colleagues pointed to the trend that their music education simply did not include creative music making. Since creative music played such a large role in my own development, both socially and musically, I felt that including creative music making in my teaching career was absolutely imperative.

I also would like to disclose my own biases. I grew up in what would be considered an “at-risk” environment. Due to various family challenges, and the financial constraints of my single-mother’s organist salary, there was little left for paid music lessons. I was privileged to be surrounded by music, so I was able to access lessons “in-kind” as a child, and then as I grew older, was identified as having some intellectual and musical ability, and so I was given many opportunities by the school board, and community music programmes in my town.

As a result of this background, I have developed the bias that giving access to music instruction, particularly creative music instruction, for all students is essential to their development in confidence, self-awareness and sense of community.

**Thesis Overview**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduced a brief overview and contextualization of my research, including methods, and explained the conceptual framework of communities of practice, musicking and creative music making. In Chapter two, I review the findings of prior empirical research related to creative music making. I explore the research in relation to my research questions and summarize the findings concerning benefits of creative music making, teacher perceptions of creative music making, and implementation of creative music making. Chapter three describes the case study methods of phase one and the action
research methods of phase two. Chapter four presents the findings of phase one, and is organized into five themes: (a) engagement; (b) sense of belonging; (c) space to explore creatively (d) something to offer and (e) tension between technical development and creative music exploration. Chapter five is a descriptive narrative describing the actions and reflections of my action research. This chapter is organized into three sections that describe creative music making activities carried out in the action research phase: improvisation, composition and soundscape. Chapter six discusses the findings of both phases, in relation to the research questions and situated within existing research and theoretical literature. This final chapter outlines the limitations of this study, implications for practice, future research needs and a conclusion framed as a personal reflection about the meaning of this research. This reflection is written as a reflective narrative of our final concert performance.
Chapter Two

Research Literature Review

In this chapter I review research literature that guided and contextualized my study. Having drawn from the theoretical understandings of communities of practice and musicking to conceptualize creative music making and community music, I took a focusing approach to the research literature, aligning research that coincides with three guiding questions: (a) *What are the benefits of creative music making*, (b) *What are teacher perceptions of creative music making*, and (c) *How is creative music making implemented in the classroom?* These guiding questions relate closely to my research study questions, and served the same purpose of revealing research findings that could inform the action research I carried out in phase two.

**Benefits of Creative Music Making**

While exploring the question *what are the benefits of creative music making*, I identified three prominent themes within the research literature: community building, social growth, and fostering creativity.

**Community building.** Burnard and Dragovic (2014) studied a community music program in Queensland, Australia that employed CMM. In a case study of eight student participants, the researchers found that through CMM, a transformative community of practice emerged, where pupils felt connected through a sense of belonging and a family-like setting for a journey of self-discovery and life-changing learning activity. CMM activity was co-influenced by the transformative nature of the community in which the tools of engagement and empowerment as well as covert rules such as co-creation, togetherness, making mistakes and risk-taking flowed together in the process of collaborative creativity. The authors also found that CMM activity has the potential to enhance pupil wellbeing by empowering them through peer-
generated supportive statements and decision-making, and by engaging them through physical embodiment of the played music (movement and dance) and improvisations/playfulness.

Researchers have also found that autonomy and self-efficacy are important components of community building through CMM. Lange (2011) examined creative music making with middle and high school-age children. Lange observed an ensemble of student improvisers in Houston, Texas to focus on the ways in which “one free improvisation ensemble both exemplifies and contradicts the visions of key theorists” (2011, p. 1). The contradiction she discovered was that the ensemble leader, at times, followed the traditional “teacher-to-student” model, although the greater outcomes of the experience for students fell in line with the leaderless nature of free improvisation. She found that free improvisation “socialized them in egalitarianism and artistic autonomy” (Lange, 2011, p. 2). Lange also found that the experience changed students’ music practices, increased self-efficacy, their understandings of power relations, and their experiences of the city in which they lived.

Other research supports the findings that participants experienced community building and self-efficacy through CMM. For example, Willox, Heble, Jackson, Walker, and Waterman (2011) examined the experiences of underserved youth aged 16-21 in a music improvisation workshop in Southern Ontario and noted that “students reported an increased ability to focus and listen carefully, not only to the music, but to each other” (p. 124) when participants felt a sense of belonging within their music community. The researchers found that changes in student self-confidence and self-expression increased individual and group cohesion, camaraderie, and growth.
Social growth. Social growth was also found to be a prominent theme of CMM research. Musical play is an approach to CMM that has been shown to foster social growth. Machover (2011) reflected that there is “much in musical education that encourages the dissociation of thought and touch . . . it has separated sound and touch, thought and feeling, concrete and abstract” (pp. 17-18). He writes about his early musical making, exploring sounds around the house with his musician mother. The informal music experiences, according to Machover, planted the seeds that music making, and musical expression can be found everywhere and are akin to play. In a review of early studies of children’s music making in natural settings, Burnard (2006) found that from a young age, children’s personal and particular musical creativity evolves through the music that young children make for themselves. In play settings, what is important to their musical experience is the meaning-making and meaning-using processes that connect them to their social environment. Young children’s musical creations are “purposeful and intentional” (Burnard, 2006, p. 114).

John (2016), in a study of 33 participants in an early childhood education class engaging in creative musical play, revealed that social and shared regulation behaviors manifested most consistently in the free exploration forms of creative musical play. Guided musical play and free exploration elicited more positive emotions than the musical play elicited during rituals. The findings of this study reveal the potential for creative musical play to enhance musical communication by nurturing children’s capacities to communicate and relate to each other.

Burnard (2002), in her role as observer/researcher, focused on the music interactions of eighteen 12-year-old children who freely improvised weekly, without adult direction, as part of an informal lunchtime creative music making club. Burnard found that the students not only thrived, but demonstrated cooperative group decision making (selecting instruments, starting and
stopping), the ability to negotiate and shift different group roles (leaders and followers), shared leadership responsibility, and overall skill at general group communicative gestures while playing.

Research has also identified the usefulness of CMM to connect students’ lived experiences to the classroom. In a case study of a public high school composition class in Toronto, Ontario, Bolden (2009) found that students were able to make the connection between their work in the classroom and what happens beyond school when teachers create “authentic” CMM assignments. In the study, the teacher participant encouraged students to use their composing to make connections between their own worlds and classroom composing, e.g., students from the Middle East incorporating rhythms from their cultural background.

Marsh (2012) outlined one case in a multiple case study examining the role of creative music making with refugee and newly arrived students in Sydney, Australia. Activities involved the creative development of music and dance forms, including drumming and hip-hop dance. The researcher found that CMM activities cultivated feelings of belonging for the newly arrived migrant children (Marsh, 2012). Using free improvisation can help break down the student-teacher power dynamic, further fostering belonging in the classroom. Niknafs (2013) explains that free improvisation is inherently democratic, and that “free improvisation blurs the line between the soloist and the accompanist, the performer and the audience, and…the music teacher and the music student” (p. 31). Free improvisation as a form of CMM can create a space for students to feel autonomous, and self-assured (Niknafs, 2013).

Feelings of belonging and inclusion are often seen as a benefit of CMM, however, some research shows that the classroom dynamic can also negatively influence inclusivity. Sætre (2011) examined three classrooms of grade six and seven students engaging in CMM in Norway.
Sætre found that from the student perspective, the context in which CMM is learned is fragile. Power, control, ownership, leadership, collaboration, communication, and expectations are all important factors discovered in practice (Sætre, 2011). For example, When the researcher analyzed the theme of collaboration in CMM, they observed that:

Communication, negotiation, suppression and encouragement are in many cases the most striking findings to be revealed from these observations . . . students sometimes were struck with fruitful ideas, though the ideas were not recognized as such because they were overlooked in the group negotiation or due to a lack of peer-leadership. (p. 43)

Striving to develop social growth through CMM is a powerful motivation for its inclusion in music education. It appears, though, that attention must be paid to community building within the classroom in order for the benefit of social growth through CMM to flourish.

Classroom contexts of gender should be considered when engaging students in CMM, as research has shown some evidence of disparity between males and females regarding anxiety and CMM. Alexander (2012) investigated the confidence, anxiety, and attitude of novice string student improvisers using a form of the Fennema–Sherman Mathematics Attitudes Scales (1976), as modified for improvisation by Wehr-Flowers (2006). The survey was given to middle school and high school string students (N = 121) after their participation in a 4-month improvisation curriculum. Alexander found that females were significantly more anxious toward improvisation than males. Wehr-Flowers’ (2006) study also found that female students were significantly more anxious toward improvisation than males.

Fostering creative learning. Creative learning focuses on the development of creativity in students during learning situations (Burnard, 2006; Craft, 2005; Jeffrey & Woods, 2009). The expression “creative learning” describes learning that occurs within specific areas, involving the
acquisition of technical skills and information that empower the development of creativity (Feldman, 2008). Using this approach in music emphasizes the involvement of students in experimentation, innovation and invention, and intellectual enquiry, or, learning music as a field of knowledge (Feldman, 2008).

Muhonen (2016) sought to understand students’ experiences (N=41) of their primary school song-crafting by examining the potential to support creative agency within school music education programs. Through semi-structured individual interviews with students who had experienced song-crafting in the past, Muhonen found that the students’ accounts of song-crafting included meanings related to general agency, creative agency, musical participation within the classroom community, and documented and shared collaborative musical products.

Student perceptions of creativity in music was examined by Coulson & Burke (2013) in a case study of students aged 5-11 (N=118). The authors also explored how educators successfully implement CMM to promote student creativity and learning. The researchers found that students produce more creative, original music when they are more confident with their musical ability. Students viewed music they enjoyed as creative. Students also believed that a variety of instruments or rhythms make music creative. Although improvisation skills were demonstrated for students, the results indicated that students might take more risks when creating music if their teachers played music and demonstrated skills more often in class.

Similarly, Lewis and Lovatt (2013) examined the divergent thinking scores of instrumental music students in the United Kingdom who had received improvisation instruction and reported that student divergent thinking scores increased following music improvisation activities more than those of students who did not experience improvisation activities. The
results indicated significant increases in fluency (quantity of ideas), originality (uniqueness of ideas), and flexibility (adaptability of ideas) but not elaboration (further development of ideas).

Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) used Webster’s (1994) Measure of Creative Thinking in Music (MCTM-II) to assess the impact of exploratory improvisation activities on the music creative thinking of 6-year-old children. Two groups of children were assigned randomly to either a control or an experimental group. The experimental group experienced various teacher-led as well as free-improvisation and exploratory music activities involving instruments, body, and voice. The control group did not experience any improvisation activities during their lessons. The pre-and post-test results showed significant improvement in the total score and in three of the four creative thinking components of the MCTM-II (syntax, originality, and flexibility) for the experimental group and little improvement for the control group.

Summary. In this review of literature, the themes of community building, social growth, and fostering creativity emerged as prominent evidence-based benefits of creative music making within music education contexts. Though the benefits are clear, literature describing how to teach CMM does not have the same breadth as conventional music education methods based in repertoire study and technical development. Research on teachers, their methods and perceptions of CMM is ongoing.

Teacher Perceptions of CMM

Research relating to the question what are teacher’s perceptions of CMM revealed themes of the teacher’s own music education, and pedagogical approaches to CMM.

Teacher’s own music education. Music teachers’ own music education plays an important part in how they conceptualize their ability to teach creative music making (Hickey, 2015). Bolden (2009) gathered that teachers are better positioned to support student composing
when they possess an understanding of creative processes (Fautley, 2005; Younker & Smith, 1996). Some research has been conducted into teacher perceptions of creativity and creative music making.

In four separate studies, Randles and Smith (2012), Randles and Muhonen (2015), Randles and Ballantyne (2018) and Randles and Tan (2019) compared United States pre-service music teachers to those in England (2012), Finland (2015), Australia (2018), and Singapore (2019). Using the creativity identity in music (CIM) tool (Randles & Muhonen, 2015) the researchers found that across all studies, non-United States participants indicated a stronger degree of creative music-making self-efficacy, value the areas of creative identity as measured by CIM to a significantly greater extent, and value the use of popular music listening/performing within the learning environment to a significantly greater extent. The researchers felt that:

If these areas of identity [measures of creativity as indicated by the CIM] are valued by the profession, then ways of including opportunities for students to be musical in these ways must be provided—during the years of primary socialisation (grade school years), and during the years of secondary socialisation (college years). (p. 239)

These combined studies suggest that some educators do not value CMM in their teaching practice, and that it might be because they had little experience with CMM in their own music education.

Abril (2014) wrote his account of pre-service music teachers in his (mandatory) first year music education university course. He explained that his students described the “ideal” classroom as a product of the music education they received:

They recreate the normative pedagogies and systems that have come to define music education in schools, including the type of music learned (classical, art), instruments
(elementary instruments, symphonic instruments), methods (directive, teacher-centered) and educational settings (formal, large group). (p. 176)

This type of music education is common across North American and European schools where little attention is paid to CMM (Bolden, 2012; Bolden, 2014; Mohenan, 2016; Odena, 2018). Students should be free to explore their own musical idioms and interests in a classroom that promotes creativity and expression, according to Hickey (2009). The author advocates for the inclusion of improvisation as creative music making in the curriculum, and identifies that current teaching models “do not ‘teach’ improvisation per se, and are more likely to hamper any creative disposition to improvise freely” (p. 292). Hickey suggests a curriculum in which students begin learning unstructured and free methods that will create an inclination towards improvisation. Students can then continue to harness this creativity while progressively including exercises that are technical-skills oriented.

Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010), in a study of the reflective diaries of 91 pre-service music teachers kept as part of their participation in an improvisation workshop, found that the preservice teachers not only gained valuable improvisatory skills from the experience, but also came to realize the “rut” they had developed: “One of the most persistent points which was raised by the students was the shortcomings of dominant formal music education training approaches to which they had been subjected” (p. 78). The shortcomings they identified included the lack of freedom of expression, focus on note reading, and anxiety-inducing improvisation experiences. The authors found that improvisation might offer a route for creating an intimate, powerful, evolving dialogue between students' identities as learners, their attitudes towards children and their creative potential, and the interrelationships of the notions of expressive technique and culture.
While engaging with the topic of teachers’ perceptions of CMM, Hickey (2015) interviewed four prominent university free-improvisation instructors in a multiple case study. The common themes that emerged among the four pedagogues included an array of unique teaching exercises, facility with nontraditional vocabulary, the establishment of a safe and egalitarian teaching space, lack of evaluation, leader as guide, comfort with spontaneity, and pedagogue as performer/improviser. The author concluded that pre-service music teacher must be given the time and space to experiment and experience with free-improvisation in order to develop the confidence and skills to include free-improvisation in the classroom.

Some research has indicated areas to improve teacher confidence in CMM teaching. For example, Varvarigou (2017) studied a group of pre-service music teachers with a traditional, classical music education experience. Varvarigou found that group-playing by ear (either from a teacher, or recordings) helped participants be more confident about improvising and to become more confident musicians. The study outlines that playing by ear in a group successfully facilitates collaborative experimentation in higher education and supports the development of pre-service music teachers’ listening, creativity and improvisation skills.

Hickey, Ankney, Healy & Gallo (2015) explored the lack of music teacher preparation in the United States. The purpose of the study was to determine if providing group free-improvisation instruction and activities to collegiate non-music majors would help them become better and more confident improvisers. The researchers found that improvisation confidence improved over time, though improvisational achievement remained static. Improvisation confidence was correlated with risk-taking personality as well as a pretest self-assessment of improvisation comfort.
In addition to the role of teachers’ own music education in CMM, much of the research literature focused on pedagogical approaches to CMM.

**Pedagogical approaches to CMM.** Upitis (2017) conceptualizes CMM teaching and learning as built on pillars of an open, inquisitive approach on the part of the teacher, and pedagogy that encourages questions and exploration situated in a “school ethos that promotes intellectual, social and emotional engagement” (p. 169). Some research has sought to explore how this approach to pedagogy materializes in the classroom.

Several educators have given descriptions of the classroom environment or climate more conducive for the development of creativity (Odena, Plummeridge, & Welch, 2005; Savage & Fautley, 2007). Three main aspects appear to form the classroom climate: the physical climate, the intellectual climate, and the emotional climate (Odena, 2018).

In a case study of secondary students in Spain, Lage-Gómez and Cremades-Andreu (2019) investigated group improvisation as a dialogic practice. Additionally, the researchers sought to identify factors that determined the music creative space for learning. Findings showed the creative music space in group improvisation was determined by: (a) active student involvement and well-being; (b) the students’ identification with the music; (c) the emergence of group flow and positive emotions manifested from both a multi-dimensional and a dual perspective; (d) a high level of motivation emerging in different forms; and (e) significant musical experiences from students’ roles as musicians.

Beegle (2010) studied two classes of fifth-grade children engaging in CMM at the elementary school where the researcher was the general music teacher. The findings of the study demonstrated that (a) the children utilized a similar planning process, and social roles and relationships were often correlated to musical roles and relationships; (b) the children’s musical
products differed based on the nature of teacher prompts; and (c) children discussed and
displayed three strategies for the development and performance of musical ideas: imitation,
memorization, and motivic development.

The use of prompts to elicit student improvisation was found to be a common CMM
method across earlier literature. In Koutsoupidou’s (2005) study in the United Kingdom, 44% of
respondent teachers reported that they used visual, verbal, or audio prompts to elicit student
improvisation, while 35% reported referring to emotions, themes, moods, or ideas to encourage
improvisation. With a class of sixth-grade students in the United States, DeLorenzo (1989) found
that children organized their CMM according to a given nonmusical plan, such as a story, and
that the more fully the students engaged in the music-making process, the more invested they
were in the final product.

A number of strategies have been found effective in stimulating CMM in composition
and improvisation activities. These include integrating music with other subject disciplines
(Barnes, 2009), using free improvisation (Hickey, 2009), teaching around expressive problems,
employing extramusical ideas (poems, video), and using structured improvisation as part of the
composition process or its performance (Philpott, 2007). However, the possibility of employing
any of these strategies will depend on the traditions of the education system, the resources
available, and, most importantly, the teachers. Reflective teaching to develop the right type of
activities for each learner or group of learners appears to be the first step for teaching creatively
(Odena, 2018). This refers to the teachers’ pedagogical creativity, which would involve being
able to stimulate curiosity and finding one’s own teaching style to promote creativity, as no
prescribed formula appears to work for everybody (Savage & Fautley, 2007).
Odena (2018) interviewed 17 educators of CMM in Northern Ireland, and carried out focus groups with student participants, aged 7-12, in order to identify different aims, and approaches to using CMM as a tool for inclusion among Catholic-Protestant divided communities. Odena explained that CMM activities were successful when educators ignored musical material associated with either group, and focused on making original music. Children seemed not to be concerned about the background of their friends during musical activities and observed that they liked participatory activities, where everybody was included. An implication from this study was that CMM activities appeared to be successful as long as they were led by confident, culturally responsive facilitators that were inclusive of all participants.

Inclusion of all students is an important contributor to CMM. It is also important that all students feel equal not only to each other, but to the instructor. Friesen (2009) explains, in an account of leading a secondary school-based improvisation workshop, that the instructor must be “pulled down from pedestal.” He found that when the teacher-student power dynamic was removed from his workshop, students felt more empowered and freer to express themselves through CMM.

**Implementing CMM**

There is little research that has led to an established method of creative music making. The literature regarding *how is creative music making implemented in the classroom* reveals some research has been performed examining pedagogical attributes of CMM, and the relationship between technical development and CMM.

**Pedagogical attributes of CMM.** Skills and abilities of performance and instruments are, according to Burnard and Younker (2008), mediated actions central to creative music making. Different types of notation, traditional and invented, may also function as mediators of
meaning among learners (Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2015). Viig (2019) researched a case study of
a Norwegian primary school where nearly 50 fifth-grade students took part in a creative music-
making project. Facilitated by two professional artists, they created an original piece of music.
Viig analyzed the findings from a socio-cultural perspective with a special focus on the
mediating tools used in the community of creative musical practice. There were three mediating
tools identified: the use of symbolic signs, such as graphic notation. Second, actions and
interactions of music making, such as conducting gestures, founded on traditional conductor
signs but also transformed collectively, and adapted to new ways of musical meaning. Third, re-
worked past experience, transforming experiences into the creation of new musical material.

Tafuri (2006), in a study of musical improvisation, discussed different types of
instructions that are typically used by educators when asking children to invent a piece of music.
Tafuri categorized the instructions as semantic (expressive tasks: “waking up” or “I am happy”),
rules (structural aspects: contrast, meter and form), or materials (simply to invent a song using
instruments provided). The author analyzed 792 improvisations by 7-10-year-old students
(N=132) from medium-to-low socioeconomic backgrounds with no musical instruction
experience. Tafuri found that the improvisations with the rules-based tasks were better
structured, but less varied than the semantic-based tasks, and that the materials-based tasks were
the least structured, and were described as “exploratory in nature” (p. 150).

Huovinen, Tenkanen, and Kuusinen (2010) conducted a study to assess the relative merits
of two approaches to teaching musical improvisation: a music-theoretical approach, focusing on
chords and scales, and a “dramaturgical” one, emphasizing questions of balance, variation and
tension. During a week-long improvisation course, pre-service music teachers (N=36) were
given either music-theoretical (n=14) or dramaturgically oriented (n=22) instruction. The
researchers found that the music-theoretical instructions led to a more significant change towards improvisation judged as dissonant and independent of the chord changes, but rhythmically uninteresting. Dramaturgical instructions led to a more significant change towards relaxed and rhythmically varied playing, but with a lack of dissonance control. Huovinen et al. conclude that a balance must be conceived between music-theoretical and dramaturgical pedagogy.

**Technical development and CMM.** Some research supports that CMM can aid technical music skills development. In a seminal study, Azzara (1993) studied the effects of music improvisation in aiding elementary aged students to read musical notation. He noted that while more research is necessary, results suggested a positive correlation between improvisation and reading notation. Thus, it is feasible that “[i]mprovising may be an effective method by which beginning instrumental music students could acquire the music thinking skills necessary to perform from notation with greater understanding as demonstrated by higher performance achievement levels” (p. 331).

Moreira and Carvallo (2010) conducted two case studies on two students at the beginning stages of learning the cello. The purpose of the study was to realize the ways in which CMM can be useful in children’s musical skills development. The results of this study demonstrated that the CMM activities created by the students reduced the technical and expressive difficulties they faced in the lessons. The researchers highlighted that these activities also promoted the teacher–student relationship, however, they emphasized that these activities could not come to fruition if an environment of trust was not provided for the students.

**Conclusion**

In this review of related literature, I summarized findings related to benefits of CMM, teacher perceptions of CMM, and implementing CMM. To orient my own research study, I
based my participant selection on criteria similar Hickey (2015), and contacted teachers who actively implement CMM in their classes for participation in the study. I examined teacher participants’ backgrounds of CMM, and observed their teaching. The research literature also guided what student age-group I included in the study, and informed some sensitizing concepts in my observations such as creative agency (Mohenan, 2016), inclusion (Odena, 2018), and musical activities (Huovinen, Tenkanen, & Kuusinen, 2010).
Chapter Three

Methodology

I undertook two phases: multiple case study methods (research questions one through four), followed by action research (research question five). In phase one, using a case study method, I examined four community music programmes. I examined the ways in which educators define and students engage in creative music making, collecting data through interviews with educators and in-class observations. Within and cross-case analyses outlined the implications of this research and areas for further study in phase two of the project. In phase two, I adopted and applied creative music practices observed from these programmes to a community music programme in Kingston, Ontario. I used an action research method that included iterative cycles of action and reflection supported by informal discussion with colleagues, journals, observation, and recordings of the students’ created music.

Phase one method. Multiple case studies are used to identify differences and similarities between several cases when a common characteristic unifies all cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Stake (2006) names this commonality between cases as the “quintain,” distinguishing the unifying attributes from the unique characteristics of each case. In the four cases studied, the unifying attributes were community music education organizations that cater to elementary-aged children in underserved populations. These music organizations also were unified by an instrumental-music pedagogy, and curriculum that included children engaging in creative music making.

Phase two method. Action research is conceptualized by Olesen (1994) as a continuum of possible research designs. Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) outline the two ends of the continuum as practical action research, where local practices and problems are studied by an
individual or team of individuals who implement a plan of action, and participatory action research, involving studying social issues that constrain individual lives and focusing on life-enhancing change through equal collaboration. Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2013) identify two features that are apparent along the spectrum: (1) the recognition of the capacity of people living and working in particular settings to participate actively in all aspects of the research process; and (2) the research conducted by participants is oriented to making improvements in practices and their settings by the participants themselves.

My action research design was primarily practical action research, as my own teaching was studied, and new action plans implemented to improve it. Reese (2003) noted that possible models for developing a pedagogical framework can be examined in the practices of experienced teachers or artists. By utilizing the data from phase one, and through discussion with my fellow teachers in phase two, I informed my own creative music making pedagogy.

Phase One—Case Study Design

Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) outline case study research design as a set of qualitative procedures used to explore a bounded system in depth. The systems in this research were four community music programmes that employ creative music making practices.

The music organizations that I chose as bounded cases were purposefully sampled. Patton (2002) argues that purposeful samples are “information-rich cases…from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169). The purpose of my research was to explore creative music making in music education settings; thus, I chose four music education organizations which engaged in CMM. The priority of CMM in relation to other music education did not factor into my case selection and the frequency of
CMM facilitation varied among the four cases, which Patton (2002) describes as “intensity sampling” (p. 171).

The cases were bounded as follows:

**Case A:** A strings-based community music programme for underserved children in a moderately sized city in Ontario. This case was situated in a population of low socioeconomic status, and is mostly white Canadians with some minority members. The programme reflected the population of the community. The participants of this programme were aged 8-12 from culturally diverse backgrounds. They met four times a week after school. It is situated in a primary school and its students make up the participants of the programme. There were multiple instructors teaching a range of musical subjects, such as instrumental technique and singing, and its musical focus was orchestral strings.

The programme itself is a free, after-school music initiative with its mission to instigate social change and create nurturing opportunities for students. Teacher participants of this programme all have a demonstrated interest in working with low-SES populations.

I gained access to this case through my personal involvement as teacher and programme coordinator.

**Case B:** A community music programme for underserved children in a large, metropolitan city in the United Kingdom. The participants of this programme were aged 8-13, mostly from the North of the United Kingdom and participated in four hours of weekly music learning in school hours, as well as twice weekly after-school ensemble rehearsal. The community population was very culturally diverse, with many newly immigrated members. The programme reflected the population of the community. There were multiple instructors teaching a range of musical subjects, such as instrumental technique and singing, and its musical focus
was orchestral strings and wind instruments. It is situated in a primary school and its students make up the participants of the programme.

The programme itself is a free, after-school music initiative with its mission to instigate social change and create nurturing opportunities for students, similar to Case A. Teacher participants of this programme all have a demonstrated interest in working with low-SES populations.

I gained access to this site by approaching the administrators through my professional connections. It is a well-known and highly regarded music programme that fit my research focus.

**Case C:** A community music programme for underserved children in a large, metropolitan city in the United Kingdom. Some of the instructors of Case B also were employed by this program. This additional initiative was offered once a week, and the participants were aged 8-16, of mixed cultural backgrounds. Participants in this group were living with exceptionalities, including hearing impairment, learning disabilities and visual impairment. The music programme is situated in a community centre in a low-SES neighbourhood. Student participants of this programme must be transported to the centre to attend, and it is up to the students’ families to facilitate this.

The programme is a free, after school initiative to give access to music instruction to students living with exceptionalities. I was invited to observe this case by one of the instructors, who also taught at case B.

**Case D:** A community orchestra programme for underserved children in a large, metropolitan city in Ontario. The participants of this programme were aged 8-13, from multiple cultural backgrounds, and met once a week, all day during school hours (approximately six hours, including breaks), for a period of five weeks. This programme was an enrichment
opportunity for students, and was a partnership with the city’s public school board. The economic status of the students was diverse. There were multiple instructors teaching a range of musical subjects, such as instrumental technique and singing, and its focus was on orchestral string and wind instruments.

I was granted access to this site by reaching out to an instructor who I knew through my professional network.

**Phase One Data Collection**

Phase one data was collected at all four case study sites using observations and interviews with instructors. Interviews are a data collection method by which participants provide responses to questions that will provide insight into the research questions of the study and are a commonly utilized method for multiple case studies (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Stake, 2005).

**Observations.** There were four observation periods—one for each case, with varying numbers of sessions observed due to availability. Case A was observed for four sessions of one-hour periods; Case B was observed for two sessions of two-hour periods; Case C was observed for one session of three hours; and Case D was observed for three sessions of three-hour periods. To help orient observation, Patton (2002) revealed Blumer’s (1954) idea of the sensitizing concept: “a guide to fieldwork, with special attention given to the words, and meanings prevalent among the people being studied” (p. 278). I focused my observation on CMM teaching within each programme, observing for sensitizing concepts of engagement, student leadership and pro-activeness, and musical growth. Observations were recorded with field notes. I also kept a journal of reflection to contextualize my observation and learning within my experience as an educator (Mills, 2011). In my field notes, I described what I noticed and struck me as significant. For example, I wrote a field note at site B that described students collaborating and encouraging
each other when engaging in creative music making (see appendix E for full field note). I wrote these field notes at each site, at the back of each class. In one case observation session (case D), an instructor had called in sick, and I was asked to teach a sectional of about 15 brass students for the morning. I did not observe that session, but it could be said that I became a participant-observer after that point, as it shaped my relationship with some of the participants.

Case sites A, B and D was chosen based on a criterion that included being extra-curricular music education targeted at primary-junior aged students. The sites also conducted music education using orchestral-based instruments (strings, wind, brass) and also included some variation of creative music making.

Case C was added as an opportunistic sample. While interviewing a participant (Toby) at Case B, he mentioned that he also taught at this site, and invited me to observe. Case B had some variation in participants: the students were generally a bit older (up to age 16), and they used popular music and rock-band instrumentation. Also, this programme was targeted at youth who live with exceptionalities.

Cases A and D were specifically chosen for the instructor participants (Max and Reggie). I was familiar with Max’s work as a creative music educator, and reached out to observe his teaching. He invited me to observe this particular project, as it was focused on CMM. Reggie was a guest artist hired to work with Case A to facilitate a series of compositions.

Table 1 presents each case, with instructor participants.

Table 1

Case Study Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Site</th>
<th>Case Location</th>
<th>Observation Date</th>
<th>Instructor Participant</th>
<th>Instructor Participant Specialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kingston, ON</td>
<td>February 5, 12, 19, 2019</td>
<td>Reggie</td>
<td>Composition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews. Interviews with instructors focused on their experience with creative music making and their perceptions of creative music making’s impact on students. At site A, I conducted four interviews: one interview with an instructor (Reggie) who actively taught creative music making, and three with instructors (Emma, Tom, and Leslie) who taught through traditional strings-based music methods. Site A employed seven instructors total. At site B, I conducted three interviews. Two instructors (Toby and Riley) actively taught creative music making, while one (Georgia) taught violin technique. Site B employed approximately 15 instructors. Site C also employed one of the instructors at site B, and I interviewed the participant (Toby) about his role in both programs. Site C employed approximately eight instructors. At site D, I interviewed one instructor (Max), who was actively engaged in teaching creative music making. Site D employed approximately 20 instructors. Using Creswell’s (2016) suggestions for designing an interview protocol, I designed a protocol (Appendix B) that included a standard procedure to be used from one interview to another with seven questions that included corresponding probes to follow up for more detail. The interviews were semi-structured, and audio recorded in person at a quiet and private location (Creswell, 2016). Interview questions were derived from research questions 1-4.

The location was agreed upon in consultation with the participant to cause the least inconvenience possible. Confidentiality and anonymity were insured to the extent possible by
creating pseudonyms and removing identifying features of the cases being studied. Table 2 presents a summary of interviews.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Interview Location</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reggie</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Harrison LeCaine Hall, Queen’s University, Kingston, ON.</td>
<td>20:10</td>
<td>05/02/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Participant’s school, Kingston, ON</td>
<td>16:09</td>
<td>04/02/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Harrison LeCaine Hall, Queen’s University, Kingston, ON.</td>
<td>28:41</td>
<td>05/12/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Coffeeshop, Kingston, ON.</td>
<td>20:52</td>
<td>26/2/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Coffeeshop, Liverpool, UK.</td>
<td>26:33</td>
<td>20/11/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toby</td>
<td>B, C</td>
<td>Site B office, Liverpool, UK.</td>
<td>29:03</td>
<td>18/11/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Site B office, Liverpool, UK.</td>
<td>13:29</td>
<td>20/11/2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Site D office, Toronto, ON.</td>
<td>24:47</td>
<td>4/03/2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Interviews for Phase One

**Phase Two—Action Research Design**

Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) state that action research provides an opportunity for practitioners to further their own professional development while at the same time working on improving their practices by taking action and participating in research. In phase two of this study, I took concepts and practices learned from phase one and applied them to my own teaching in a strings-based community music programme for participants aged 8-12. I studied the implementation of a creative music-making unit with these participants. The duration of this unit was three weeks, including three hours of instructional time each week. The weeks were not consecutive, and took place over a period of three months.

Participants for phase two included myself, as researcher and instructor of creative music making; my colleagues, two experienced strings teachers and one voice teacher; the director of the community music programme, a senior-level university music instructor; and the students, aged 8-12 years, who participate in the community music programme.
Phase Two Data Collection

Using a cyclical, action research method (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015) of taking action, reflecting on this action, and collecting data from the action, I applied data to new action in the creative music unit. Mills (2011) writes that robust action research data is comprised of three E’s: Experiencing (through observation and field notes), examining (using and making records), and enquiring (when the researcher asks). Data were collected using active participant observation (experiencing), personal journals (examining), and informal interviews with the teacher and director participants (enquiring). In addition, although I employed a practical action research design, I made use of participatory action research methods of collaboration (Macquire, 1987) with the teacher participants to guide my reflection and practice. This took place in the form of unstructured focus groups, that took place during weekly staff meetings, and informal interviews that manifested as peer-discussions regarding the day’s lessons. These elements were recollected in my field journals.

Analysis

The case study approach can combine deductive (theory testing) and inductive (theory generating) elements (Stake, 2006). In relation to deductive research theory, previous literature and existing evidence on creative music and its impact on students have led to the development of several propositions driving this research (i.e., creative music activities are likely to influence students’ personal and social wellbeing, sense of belonging, and engagement). Patton (2002) suggests that qualitative research begins with an inductive approach—an approach that allows categories, themes, and patterns to surface from the data collected. The analysis of how creative music making activities influence student outcomes was, broadly speaking, inductive, building on the assumption that the experiences and meanings derived from participation are socially
produced within specific settings nested within the community music programmes. An inductive approach was also employed for the phase two action research to develop insights based in the experiences of the participants and the meanings they develop.

**Phase One Data Analysis**

I transcribe audio-recordings of each interview session, replacing any references to the participants or other people with pseudonyms. To ensure that participants’ intended message was accurately portrayed, I applied a member-checking protocol after the data analysis process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) in a study. Member checking for this study included draft versions of interview transcripts for participants to review.

After emailing participants the transcript from their interview for review, I confirmed that their responses to the questions accurately represented their perspectives and experiences. There were no concerns—participants were satisfied with their transcriptions. No participants asked to be removed from the programme.

I used a general inductive and deductive approach to analyze the data by reading the transcripts to identify and code segments of text relevant to the study purpose, grouping codes to create categories, and finally grouping categories to form emergent themes which I have explained in my findings (Thomas, 2006). This qualitative process was used because it allowed topics, categories and themes to emerge. The coding process was conducted in Microsoft Word, and by hand (highlighting, underlining, and taking notes).

Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) “suggest that qualitative researchers continually evaluate the list of codes they have generated” (p. 361) in order to refine codes, and eventually group into themes. After analysing interview transcripts, and my field observation notes, 53
initial codes were further refined to 15 categories. I then grouped the categories into themes.

Many codes were duplicated across multiple themes (see Table 3).

Table 3

**Emerging Codes, Categories and Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code (Topic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Space to explore creatively</em></td>
<td>Tools to teach CMM</td>
<td>Teacher’s CMM in early education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher’s CMM in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher: no experience with CMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoys CMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Jamming out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navigating mistakes</td>
<td>Creating playful atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CMM in early education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CMM in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CMM In performing career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student experience with CMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exploring sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CMM activities-improvisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CMM experience as part of “team”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Student’s musical interest creating community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Works with other teachers who use CMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Jamming out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>Relating to music</td>
<td>CMM impact on students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CMM Activity-arranging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Including students’ preferred musics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parameters</td>
<td>CMM activity-word cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blues scale/form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harmonic suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prompts for emotion/dynamics/other musical elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>Teacher CMM experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student musical interests</td>
<td>Teacher’s experience with CMM vs. student interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Students experience with CMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student input</td>
<td>Student voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3 Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Something to offer</th>
<th>Inviting input</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Collaborates to incorporates CMM into teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Recording student work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of CMM in</td>
<td>CMM activity: Technology as “backing track”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher education</td>
<td>Teacher perceptions of CMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playing in informal music ensembles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating CMM</td>
<td>Teacher experience with CMM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>into technical</td>
<td>CMM activity: group improvisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exercise</td>
<td>Repertoire selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between</td>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technique and CMM</td>
<td>Partnerships with established performers/composers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CMM priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technical development priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance preparation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I analysed transcripts and observation data from each case individually and then performed a cross-case analysis. While analysis of each case individually provided rich insight, it was insufficient to leave each case unrelated when attempting to address commonalities between cases (Stake, 2006). Individual case analyses were used to build a cross-case analysis that informed conclusions regarding the cases collectively (Stake, 2006).

### Phase Two Data Analysis

This phase included two sources from which data were collected and analyzed: personal journals and colleague focus groups. At the end of each of the three weeks of teaching, I used a general inductive and deductive approach to analyze the data by reading the transcripts of interviews and my journals to identify and code segments relevant to the study purpose. Codes were grouped to create categories, and categories grouped to form emergent themes to report as findings (Thomas, 2006). There were 13 pages of personal journals.

I presented the analysis, informally during weekly staff meetings, to the focus group, where participatory analysis occurred. This simple analysis materialized as comments and
suggestions for action during our staff meetings, or in passing at the research site. Overall, the focus group analysis was casual, and conversational. I made general notes from the focus group, and analyzed the notes using the same inductive and deductive approach. The analysis that emerged was applied to the action (my teaching) the following instructional session. This process was repeated for each week of the action research study.

**Trustworthiness**

In phase one and two, I employed triangulation across my data sources to validate the data. I searched for convergence among observation and interview data to validate findings in this study (Creswell & Miller, 2010).

Phase two also required member-checking and researcher reflexivity (Patton, 2002). Mills (2011) states that “in an intimate activity such as action research, it is a challenge to remain objective and open” (p. 114). Mills further explains that developing propositions that explore the researcher’s bias, will keep the researcher vigilant in the fidelity of data collection (2010). As I was active in teaching the programme in phase two, I self-disclose my assumptions, beliefs, and biases, in the section entitled “role of the researcher.”
Chapter Four

Phase One Findings

Phase One Themes

Through my interviews and observations in phase one, five themes emerged as significant in how instructors approach creative music making across all three sites: 1) engagement; 2) sense of belonging; 3) space to explore creatively; 4) something to offer; 5) tension between technical development and creative music making.

Theme One: Engagement

The theme of engagement through creative music making emerged as prominent within the data. Subthemes that contributed to engagement included freedom, parameters, connecting to student’s own musical and sound experiences, and collaboration.

Freedom. Toby described how freedom contributed to his students’ engagement in CMM:

A lot of our teaching is about learning techniques and pieces working towards a performance, so those moments where it’s totally creative and the students are to make their own pieces up is a nice, freer kind of activity. It doesn’t feel so much like ‘oh we’ve got to learn this, we’ve got to play this again,’ not that it is negative, and I believe there can be creativity there, but [the students] definitely get a kick out of doing their own thing and can break the rules, if you know what I mean. (Toby, p. 8)

Freedom was a term used by other participants when talking about CMM and engagement, and they generally felt musical freedom was a concept of CMM that benefited their students. Some participants, however, felt that musical freedom can be overwhelming for teachers:
The grade 5 curriculum, for example, asks teachers to compose with students, and even music students who have gone through university for music, don’t know that much about composing. You’re asking a tremendous amount from these teachers. (Reggie, p. 4)

Reggie also pointed out that musical freedom can be overwhelming for students: “If I just asked you, or had a kid in front of me, ‘just improvise some sounds.’ They would be a little bit lost.” (p. 5). The instructors I spoke with described using parameters as a strategy to negotiate freedom.

**Parameters.** I observed, across all three sites, that the participants generally placed parameters on creative music exploration exercises. That is, they provided some sort of framework for the students to explore making their own music, rather than asking students to start playing completely spontaneously. Reggie explained: “If I said ‘can you pretend to be a bird’ or ‘can you make sounds that you would hear in a zoo’ or something, then they have some frame of reference, from the sounds they already know.” (p. 5)

In practice, this concept of using parameters to help students meaningfully negotiate freedom within creative music making took a variety of forms. Max focused on using the blues scale and blues progression to explore improvisation; the Site B instructors used iPads with the app GarageBand to provide a harmonic structure and beat-making for students to improvise over; Reggie seemed to “coax” vocal melodies from the students by playing harmonic progressions (of his own making) and asking students to sing what they felt; and instructors at Site C created a word-cloud on chart paper and had students contribute ideas to a particular theme (in this instance, it was “winter”) for which students could free-style rap over. In each instance, students were focused and engaged, and some very interesting musical ideas emerged.

**Connecting to student’s own musical and sound experiences.** Another tool that instructors used to facilitate CMM with their students was to relate the music making to their
students’ own musical and sound experience. Reggie voiced his belief that “it is always good to get some sort of real-world connection for students to relate to, instead of it being so abstract.” He went on to explain how using specific, real-world sounds, such as passing cars or sounds in nature, can help situate music making within a student’s sonic environment. Max had a similar sentiment, taking the concept to broader musical interests and compared his students’ tastes and experience to his own:

> What music do we play? What was the experience I had in terms of the free improv stuff I was drawn to [as a music student]? I can’t go into a school to do a workshop and do a John Cage, or John Zorn or Murray Schafer or Pauline Oliveros piece because they look at me like “who is this…guy?” It just doesn’t work the same. So, I started to think about ways you can do the same thing, but with different music, like whatever music the kids might like. (Max, p. 15)

Max was commenting on the choice of repertoire for his students, and how his experience in the Western European art music tradition did not necessarily translate to his students, many of whom had no connection to Western art music. He felt that it was imperative to include his students’ musical tastes into the classroom. Similarly, while observing the instructors at Site C, I saw that many of the students were eager to share what they had been listening to with the instructors. As students trickled into the classroom, small groups of students were gathering around instructors, with phones outstretched, or single earbuds being offered. Variations of “check this out!” or “[teacher], listen to this!” echoed across the classroom as students offered samples of the music that they were excited about. Instructors were warm, excited, and inquisitive about the music being shared. They asked questions about why the students liked the piece, where they heard it, or if they wanted to try and learn the piece. To me, this was one of the
most prominent examples of students being engaged in their music class. It was evident that they were not just sharing the music, but also aspects of their own self.

Riley noted that when students were sharing the music that they were interested in, they were engaged, and also were eager to tell others about the music. She noticed that in many cases, students would assume a leadership role, teach other students about the song, or would begin to arrange the song for their own performance. Riley also noted that a sense of community emerged through this engagement, as students related to liking similar artists.

**Collaboration.** The data also indicated that within a CMM context students were engaged when activities were collaborative. Interestingly, engagement and collaboration seemed to impact each other reciprocally; students became engaged through collaboration, but also sought to collaborate because they were engaged. Students at Site A were particularly engaged while working collaboratively to construct a storyline and corresponding lyrics to a number of songs that would make up a music theatre piece. Reggie would prompt the students using open-ended questions, but the class turned very collaborative as students worked out ideas with each other. Some students were more engaged than others, and contributed more to the creation of the songs. In one instance there were two students who were at the back of the classroom, not contributing much. As the class continued, and more ideas were being shared, I observed that the engaged students started to ask the two less-engaged students their opinion of the piece. At first, there was no or little response, and the class turned their attention back to Reggie and writing. Before long, however, one of the students at the back of the class voluntarily offered an idea, which was met with a positive response from the rest of the class. The two students were invited to join the rest of the group by their peers, and upon sitting down with the group, were met with
warm hugs from the other students. Reggie continued to ask open-ended questions, but focused on the idea put forth by these two students.

Collaboration can promote engagement through play in CMM. As Reggie explained:

[CMM] can be incredibly fun. Creative music is really more akin to play, which is very engaging for young people—and old people! I think the arts in general—I think life in general—we need to play a lot more than we do…that makes life kinda miserable, that we don’t play or enjoy things more…Creative music has even more of a connection to play that we need to explore. (Reggie, p. 9)

The attributes of play in CMM engaged students, according to the teachers I interviewed, and also in my observations. With engagement, a team-like atmosphere developed in the classes, which led to another theme of my study, that an element of CMM is a sense of belonging among participants.

**Theme Two: Sense of Belonging**

A significant theme across participant data was the connection between creative music making and a sense of belonging. Elements that contributed to a sense of belonging were community, relating to the music, and inclusion.

**Community.** Participants indicated that throughout their education, and later professional careers, a defined community of CMM practitioners contributed to their sense of belonging. Participating in CMM “scenes” through their early music education made them feel like they belonged:

Being a part of bands, and writing and playing the music we wrote and sharing it with people made me feel like I was part of a community, and we made a community together. Everyone I played with was also organizing shows, supporting each other’s music,
seeking out new people to play with. It’s something I don’t think I’d get in band class.

Like, I think the problem with a lot of orchestra musicians is that they never just jammed out together, you know? (Tom, p. 3)

The musical activity of “jamming out” was important to Tom. Through improvising, and sketching out grooves and songs, he felt like he was brought closer to his bandmates. By supporting each other’s creative music making, they were creating a community of musicians, who felt that they belonged to a certain “scene,” such as punk rock musicians. Conversely, another participant, an orchestral musician, experienced the very lack of “jamming out” with fellow musicians that Tom described as problematic, and limiting to a sense of belonging.

Growing up doing the Suzuki method—there was no aspect of creative education in that. It’s all about reproducing, and a lot of ear training, and, and, you know, doing it like everybody else…we played in a group, but it wasn’t creative and didn’t create anything together, so it felt like we were just bringing someone else’s—like a stranger’s—music to life. (Emma, p. 3)

Emma’s description of composers of the repertoire she learned in her education as “someone else” or “strangers” seems to indicate a barrier between herself and the music. As a performer, she had no connection to the creation of the piece or person who wrote it. Her description of “reproducing” music, and “doing it like everybody else” resembles being part of some sort of musical machine, with little sense of ownership of the music. Being a part of a traditional orchestra, of course, can bring students a sense of belonging, at least in the sense of being part of a “team.” She seems to infer, however, that a lack of creative input to the music she was making made her feel like it did not belong to her—or her, to it.
Relating to the music. For Emma and Tom, community and relating to the music were tied to creating a sense of belonging, and to creative music making. Two other teacher participants also defined relating to the music as an important aspect of CMM, and I observed that it contributed to the students’ sense of belonging across the programs I observed.

Riley, of Site B, conceptualized creative music making in terms of a sense of belonging, and explained how she guided students’ creative connections to orchestral music. She described members of the BBC orchestra visiting her program to discuss and perform selections from Britten’s *Sea Interludes*. After performing the work, the members of the orchestra tasked the class to pull a motif from the piece, and learn it. The class then took the motif, and expanded it into an entirely new composition. Riley noted that the students were incredibly responsive to the exercise, and that she could sense that they felt connection to their peers, as they beamed with pride over their accomplishment.

Max recognized the importance of including music to which his students relate. Max had a similar exercise to Riley’s Site B exercise, but a major difference was that instead of using material from the orchestral cannon, he asked students what songs they were listening to, and subsequently pulled some motifs—riffs—from the pop songs. He explained:

> I started to think about ways you can do the same thing [concepts from composition], but with different music, like whatever music the kids might like. I would teach them a riff or a song and even if they didn’t, you know, *like* Drake or Hotline Bling, they thought it was hilarious to play it on their string instrument. And then we’d take it from there and mess with it, and improvise on it. (Max, p. 15)

The humour and fun in “messing” with riffs was ever present in my observation of Max’s sessions. He broke down a number of songs into distinct riffs: usually a combination of verse and
chorus riffs, bassline riffs, instrumental riffs and other distinguishing motifs from the song. In one session, he asked the class, “how should we arrange this? Should we start with the chorus? Verse? Bassline? Who’s going to play?” A student suggested: “Let’s have the flutes start the bassline!” coercing some twittering and giggles out of the students. “Cool! Okay, well what do we do after that?” he responded. Immediately an excited bass player shouted “let’s all do the bassline!” And it was settled. The flutes began the familiar bass riff of Wannabe by the Spice Girls¹, twice through, followed by a resounding “WHOMP” as the entire 70-person ensemble joined in. Max had them repeat the line over and over, first in unison, and then, by using hand signals, differentiated the dynamics, changed instrumentations, had students play the riff solo, or improvise over the bassline using the blues scale. It worked really, really well. The band shared laughter and discussed their favourite moments of the performance. By creating the arrangement together, in a fun, spontaneous, and engaging way, the students felt they had created something unique and their own. The sense of belonging that emerged from this creative music making exercise was very evident—and as an observer even I felt that I belonged during this special happening.

Inclusion. The theme of a sense of belonging was mentioned by all participants that were interviewed as a benefit of CMM. To create a sense of belonging, I observed that inclusion was an important element. During the Site C ensemble session, I observed a strong example of inclusion.

¹ Much to my surprise, the students chose Wannabe as a song they wished to perform. When discussing this with the instructors after the session, they were equally baffled. “Of all the pop tunes from the 90s that would endure to this generation,” an exasperated percussion instructor told us, “Spice Girls is what these kids are digging!” It was a testament to the fact that we, as educators, can never know what is ringing in the ears of our students, how they are exposed to music, or what music they pick up on.
One student living with Autism Spectrum Disorder was particularly fond of The Edge, a guitarist from the band U2. He seemed to know everything about him, and the student had an exact replica of one of the guitar models The Edge used. During my observation session, the student frequently came over to play U2 riffs for me, and to tell me how he learned them from listening to the records. “It’s okay to ask him to stop,” I was told by another instructor, “he can be a little overboard with sharing.” The student was known to play certain phrases over, and over, which could sometimes distract and discourage other students from participating. As an activity in an earlier session, the facilitator had asked the student to prepare a lick (a short, musical phrase) from one of The Edge’s solos, which the student had been repeatedly listening. The student presented the lick in this session, and the instructor asked everyone to learn it by ear, turning it into a repeatable riff. From there, the group created a four-bar groove, which included students playing drums, bass, and keyboards. When they had practiced the four-bar groove a few times, the instructor recorded it using a pre-set recording setup. He then quickly uploaded the audio file to a cloud-based file host, so that the students could listen to the groove with their families when they got home. Every student was excited to show their loved ones their work, especially the guitarist.

Being included in the Site C ensemble contributed significantly to students’ sense of belonging:

I certainly get the impression that the students, through Site C, that their self-confidence has increased, and there’s definitely a community aspect in that…it is like a proper gathering, or a family. It’s like everyone knows each other so well and everyone loves being there, and some of them talk a lot in particular about “my band,” being in a band, being with everyone else. (Toby, p. 16)
A sense of belonging emerged across all cases as an important theme of creative music making, comprised of community, relating to the music, and inclusion.

**Theme Three: Space to Explore Creatively**

In the data collected from the instructors, being given the space to explore creatively was a theme that emerged as significant with regard to their ability to teach creative music making. Subthemes that contributed to creating space to explore creativity were tools to teach CMM, and navigating anxiety over making mistakes.

**Tools to teach CMM.** Three of the instructors who did not identify as CMM practitioners mentioned that they did not have adequate “tools” to teach their students CMM. Leslie felt that she did now learn these tools in her education, thus could not pass on the skills to her students:

> I tried to improvise in university, but it was very difficult. It was so much about hearing. And the chords—and if you haven’t grown up hearing chords—people would ask ‘do you hear the 9th or the 11th or the 13th?’ I’m like ‘no, why would I!’ Of course, I don’t hear those, I just sit there listening to chords that all just sound the same to me, because I didn’t grow up that way. (Leslie, p. 3)

Leslie’s experience was echoed by Georgia and Emma, who both felt that in their education, they were not provided with the space to explore making their own music, or the opportunity to acquire the tools needed to teach CMM. Georgia felt that as she became more accomplished and entrenched in orchestral music, the opportunity to engage in CMM diminished, along with the ability to develop the tools to teach CMM (such as the capacity to hear the difference between chord types, as Leslie described above). She felt that in her
performing experience she could not extend beyond the classical music space, and that to improvise or compose left her with some anxiety over “making mistakes.”

Reggie, while reflecting on his development as a CMM instructor, stated that “I think a lot of people go ‘wow that’s a lot easier than I thought and I didn’t think that qualified.’ A lot of teachers feel that to be a composer, you need to be a doctorate student of music” (p. 8). In his experience, it was a teacher who made composition ordinary, relatable and action-oriented that got him engaged. Reggie explained that he developed the tools early on as a means to get excited about music: “CMM might do for people what it did to me in grade 6. Instead of hating music, you can see another angle to what music is makes me appreciate it a lot more” (p. 24).

Max also developed tools early on to engage with CMM both as a teacher and performer. Max employed a technique of listening to pieces, and pulling out identifiable themes (riffs) from the music to learn by ear, and then turn into something else. He explained that he used this tool in more classical-oriented settings as well, as a means to bridge the gap of experience for classical musicians and CMM:

We took the riffs out of a Gershwin piece, and it was easily done. I said “K, let’s make our own version of this!” so they saw how Gershwin would have composed, and they still see that he is a master, but getting them to do it themselves in some ways was more exciting. It might not have sounded as good, whatever that might mean…I think that “sounding good,” you know, is a trap for music education. (Max, p. 21)

For students primarily trained in a classical setting, breaking down the riffs of well-known pieces made the composition or arranging process “less scary” and helped his students think divergently about the repertoire they already knew.
Navigating anxiety over making mistakes. Feeling anxious about making mistakes was a common element that existed within the space to explore creatively. Emma mentioned an observation of hers regarding a colleague’s string orchestra:

[A colleague,] Dave, ran an orchestra for the sole purpose of getting students to play non-classical music, but also to develop improvising skills. That met with only mixed success, not because of Dave, but because of resistance among the students to get out of their comfort zone. Part of the problem with classical music training is that our comfort zone is so restricted. The emphasis on being correct is so strong that to veer off being correct and sort of risk being incorrect, is really scary. (Emma, p. 19)

Emma’s description that Dave’s orchestra was not fully successful, due to the reluctance of the students, and anxiety over making mistakes, was apparent during my observation of Site D. There was an accomplished trumpet player (Student A) who was a leader in the trumpet section. Student A was very happy to help her peers learn the written music and help with technique. When asked to improvise, however, she was extremely reluctant, and refused to improvise in class.

Max asked the students to arrange a series of popular songs, however they wanted, for a performance. Max split the large ensemble into smaller groups of eight to ten students (seven groups total.) Each student had been given notated segments of each song. The segments included elements such as the bassline, melody, and background harmony Max asked the students to create arrangements using these riffs. Student A was not engaged in this activity whatsoever, calling it “stupid” and “a waste of time.” She felt that if the ensemble had been given a pre-arranged piece, she could more fruitfully spend their time learning the piece, and playing it well.
During the arranging activity, Student A took on a leadership role, but continued to make negative comments to the group. Using chart paper, Max had asked students to write down what riffs would be played when, and with what instrumentation. The students were encouraged to creatively arrange the tunes, for example, by having the bassline performed by woodwinds. The student understood the assignment well, but did not think it was a good activity.

Max brought all students back together in the large ensemble, and asked each group to present their arrangement and to tweak the arrangement after hearing how it sounded. Most groups simply showed their chart, explained their thinking, and asked Max to lead. When Student A’s turn came around, she asked to come to the front and lead instead. Student A proceeded to explain the arrangement, and the ensemble played it through. It sounded really good, and it was obvious from her expression that she was surprised. It was apparent to me that Student A suddenly had gained creative inspiration, as they continued to try new ideas and new arrangements spontaneously until they were happy with how the piece sounded. Over the course of the revisions, she would sing what she heard the piece as sounding like, and even improvised melodies to add to the arrangement using her instrument. The students in the ensemble were encouraging of Student A’s ideas, and many offered supportive statements when she was unsure of the sound of the piece. The success of her arrangement caused the student to feel more confident about her own musical ideas. To me, student A had totally changed her attitude about CMM, was more engaged with the project, and was visibly proud of her group’s work. I believe this was a result of the supportive and collaborative environment of the ensemble and teacher.

Overcoming the anxiety of “sounding bad” through a supportive and collaborative environment was observed at Site C, as well. Toby asked students to brainstorm new song ideas, or new grooves to jam on. After the students agreed on a chord progression, Toby asked them to
come up with some melodic ideas to fit the chord changes. Students were mostly engaged and contributing different ideas, though one student stated that he “didn’t have any ideas.” When Toby pressed for some more information, the student said that she felt “embarrassed” and that she did not think she sounded good. The rest of the class disagreed, and a fellow student remarked that she was a “spot on singer.” Toby asked her to think of a song she liked to sing, and to try and fit the chorus of one of those into the new chord progression. The student thought that the chord progression sounded similar to a tune she knew, and began singing the song over the progression. Toby then asked her to try and change the notes of the song, but not the words, to see if she could create a “new version of it.” The student sang a new melody line using the existing words of the song, after which she stated, “that wasn’t so bad!” The student had overcome her initial anxiety over CMM as a result of the supportive environment of Site C, and by Toby relating her previous musical knowledge to new contexts.

The space to explore creatively, by exercising tools to teach CMM, and allowing students to navigate anxiety over making mistakes created an atmosphere where students could feel confident that they had something to offer their music making community. The theme of having something to offer emerged across my data as a key element of CMM.

**Theme Four: Something to Offer.**

Throughout my data, the theme of something to offer emerged. This theme contained the following subthemes: inviting student input, performance, and use of technology.

**Inviting student input.** There were a number of instances that I observed in which students were invited to give their opinions and observations regarding musical material, regardless of their musical level. This invitation helped students feel like they had something to contribute to the group. Riley explained, “[I use] creative music making for children who maybe
don’t have the technical aptitude, but they’ve got lots to give, and it’s finding a voice for them in
the room” (p. 18)

At Site B, I observed how Riley enacted this sentiment. There was a robust relationship
between the community music programme and a local symphony orchestra. The program had
hired a nationally-lauded composer to write a piece for the students to play. Though the
composer did not seek input from the students musically, he came to the class to solicit
suggestions on what the piece’s themes should be, by asking the students a series of questions,
and creating music according to their responses. After collecting the information, the composer
left to complete the piece. At a session I observed, the final draft of the piece was distributed,
professionally printed, with titles of the movements bearing credit to certain students. When one
student read her name, she was in disbelief that her imagination had guided the work. Riley
asked her to come to the front of the ensemble, and to explain how she came up with the title.
She beamed with pride, as she explained that she had thought of summer and meadows (it being
a particularly dreary time of year for the city) and thought how it “would be cool to be in two
places at once—like split yourself. You could be in the summer as well as the rain!” The
resulting music contained rhythmic motifs in 9/8 that repeated throughout the orchestra, in
different instrumentations and harmonic contexts. The student connected to the music in a deeply
personal way, and the piece was referred to as “her” piece for the duration of the session. Riley
asked the students to listen to a MIDI recording of the work that the composer had sent in, and
asked if the piece conveyed the student’s theme. After listening to the piece, an animated
discussion took place, with students adding to the story of the song, including horse races, and simultaneous royal weddings happening electronically.\(^2\)

All participants made some type of comment that working alongside composers was a connection to CMM in their education. The participants seemed to believe that an important aspect of CMM was to include the composer of a work, so that they could connect and offer their interpretations of the music:

I played in a lot of new music ensembles, and I worked with composers, young and established composers, and that was fun. To talk about interpretation of what’s on the page and all of that stuff, so…I enjoyed that. [It] felt like I was contributing to the creative process somewhat. (Emma, p. 6)

**Performance.** Even when collaborating with composers, though, some participants outlined an “otherness” between what a composer does (*create*), and what a performer is supposed to do (*perform*). Emma explained the historical expectation of performers to include improvised cadenzas in their performance, and that CMM manifested as improvising cadenzas in well-known compositions. She reflected to where the disconnect between CMM and performing as a classical musician took place, offering that it may be a symptom of the virtuosic expectation of classical music performers.

Leslie felt that there was an inherent disconnect between what she offers as a performer, and what composers offer:

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\(^2\) I asked the student after the session what, exactly, made them think of an electronic royal wedding: “Well, it felt like a dance, and you dance at a wedding, and it sounds like robots!” The robot sounds were the artificial sound of MIDI, and there was a particularly famous royal wedding that had occurred very recently. I really enjoyed these three seemingly disparate elements coming together in this student’s interpretation.
[A colleague who identifies as a composer] has tunes just going on in his head and I see that as something that he has and it is something that I don’t have, whereas if I had grown up creating more music I would know that I, too, could compose a melody and that it is legitimate. [laughing] I have nothing to offer, creatively. (Leslie, p. 14)

While discussing her students, Leslie felt that they had plenty to offer creatively, and remarked on the pride her students felt when they compose:

They feel a sense of ownership. Anytime I let them write their own pieces they are so proud to show their parents and if I write it out for them [in notation], it looks like a ‘real’ piece of music, that they wrote, with their name on it. They’re always most proud of that over anything that they’ve learned. (Leslie, p. 15)

Leslie continued that when students performed their own works, they felt they had contributed something personal to the concert, and that parents often were in disbelief that their child had written the piece.

All cases were working toward the goal of a performance—a common goal of almost all music making projects. The inclusion of student-created or co-created works was a common feature of all four programmes I observed. Participants indicated that students felt proud and confident when their work was featured:

I think in terms of performance, you can present new works by children really nicely…[i]t can be the piece the children are most engaged in, and therefore the audience is most engaged in. But, it needs a little bit of thought…[i]t’s not that it doesn’t meet the same level as a pre-composed piece of music, but putting it in, on the right platform, and framing it nicely, is important. (Riley, p. 20)
The idea of taking everything that students create, and putting it all into a performance, is not feasible. Riley, Toby and Leslie all indicated that using technology, in the forms of audio recording, video recording and quick score notation software helped facilitate the feeling of something to offer for the students.

**Use of technology.** Participants indicated that students’ creations often needed more editing, were much too short, or simply didn’t sound very good. At Site B and the Site C ensemble, participants used technology to capture CMM moments in the classroom. In the Site C sessions I observed that Toby had constructed a rudimentary recording setup, using a small mixing board, microphones, his laptop, and a digital audio workstation. When students felt that they had created something interesting—a groove, full song, lyrics—Toby was able to quickly capture the creation in the digital audio workstation. He did not edit any of the audio files, but simply stored them with the names of the students and date. He explained that many of the audio files simply got deleted, but they took time to decide together whether or not they should be kept. For example, in the next session he would ask “does this still sound good?” and then how they could change the material, or should they simply start over. By using technology in the classroom, teachers were able to quickly capture CMM moments, for either later dissemination, or, to share with the community through cloud-based storage. This allowed students to have artifacts of their CMM offerings, even if they were not featured in a large performance, and contributed to the students’ belief that they had something to offer.

The programming of student-created work alongside established orchestral repertoire pieces in a concert setting was one example of how CMM and traditional music education could sometimes be at odds with one another. A theme of tension between CMM and technical development arose throughout my study.
Theme Five: Tension Between Technical Development and Creative Music Exploration

The final theme that I identified in my data was the tension between technical development and creative music exploration. Subthemes that emerged included lack of CMM in teacher music education, maintaining a balance between CMM and technical development, and incorporating CMM into technical exercises.

**Lack of CMM in teacher music education.** Throughout my interviews, the sentiment that teachers were not prepared to teach CMM was prevalent. When reflecting on their own music education, which focused on technical development on an instrument, some teachers indicated that they did not gain any creative music practice. As they grew into music educators, they felt that they did not possess the tools to teach CMM, compared to teaching through established music methods. Some teachers did engage in CMM alongside traditional music education in their musical upbringing, however, these activities were exclusive of one another:

It was really cool to play in bands, or whatever, one day, then the next be playing in the student orchestra. Like, it made sense to me that it was all connected—an A on the cello is an A on my guitar, right? But the kids I played with [in the orchestra] thought it was totally different music to play if it was a rock song or something. (Tom, p. 6)

In Tom’s case, he was self-directed in exploring CMM with his peers, in a community music setting. His technical and traditional music learning occurred within private lessons and in a school music setting.

**Maintaining a balance between CMM and technical development.** For the teachers in my study, combining CMM and established education methods that focus on technical development was a difficult concept, in terms of balance:
There needs to be a balance between letting students explore their own creative ideas and developing the discipline of technical growth. That’s a balance and it’s really hard because I feel a lot of the more creative people don’t have very developed technique. And vice-versa. So, a lot of really technically developed people don’t have advanced creative music skills. (Emma, p. 24)

During my observation, it appeared that the Site C group was interested in creating new music much more than developing technical proficiency on instruments. Toby was more concerned with eliciting creative expression than technical development, particularly in cases of exceptional learners. Toby found that incorporating technology would often help students connect more with music making, as they did not have to worry as much about playing perfectly: I use things like Theremins, iPads, things like that…I’ll take my laptop, I’ve got Logic [music production software] on there, and just record songs with people. It doesn’t need to be a specific thing. It might just be a spontaneous composition or a song they know. Using microphones, I’ve found—especially with young people on the Autistic Spectrum—you can have children who won’t speak, but if you give them a microphone with an effect on it [e.g., delay, reverb, filtering] they’ll sing, they’ll talk through it, and that can unleash a lot of creativity which was previously, you know, untapped. (Toby, p. 17)

During the sessions I observed in Site C, very little attention was paid to developing instrumental technique or music theory. The students were purely making music together, and there was no instruction given to how to play. One student, I noticed, played guitar with it laid across his lap, as opposed to upright on his knee. I asked an instructor why he played it that way, and was simply told that “he prefers to have it on his lap.” He was strumming rhythmically, and
very engaged. Other students followed his rhythms and soon a simple groove emerged as they jammed. Toby recorded the music, and asked what they thought. “That was fun!” a student said. The instructor analyzed the chords from the lap-guitar, and taught the rest of the group the chord changes, approximating any missing harmony. The instructor did not elaborate on what was missing from the chords, and taught the complete chord to the other players who were interested.

Though the students were engaging with CMM wholeheartedly, there was little technical practice that I observed. This theme was evident across all cases—that either students were engaged in CMM and not practicing technique, or they were practicing technique and not engaging in CMM. Georgia explained how students seem to “forget their technique” when engaging in CMM:

> When I have students play whatever they want, I notice that they really scoop up and between notes, not put their fingers in a proper position [on stringed instruments]. I guess it is good for their listening, because they are playing what they think sounds good, but they really are forming bad habits in terms of their string playing. (Georgia, p. 14)

Proper finger positioning is a very important technical aspect to string instrument playing, and to Georgia, establishing position habits was the one of the most important learning goals for beginning students.

**Incorporating CMM into technical exercises.** Riley also maintained the view that establishing good technical habits was important. She also noticed that students tended to forget their technique when engaging in CMM. To help remedy this problem, it was her belief that teachers could incorporate CMM into technical exercises:

> Creative outlets, and creativity can happen right from the start. It’s part of the development of understanding and enjoyment of music. If it happens too late, it becomes
very academic and you miss that moment to be imaginative and have confidence in your own music. And it can be a really useful asset to be creative about technical things.

(Riley, p. 25)

At Site B, I observed how Riley put this into practice using an improvisation exercise that had students limit their creative music making to a limited number of notes in a particular musical scale, and for limited note values, such as quarter and half notes. When the students were limited to these parameters, their playing was markedly more in tune, and rhythmically precise.

Conclusion

The themes of engagement, sense of belonging, space to explore creatively, something to offer, and tension between technical development and creative music exploration were valuable to recognize as important areas to consider as I designed and implemented my own teaching practice. In the next section, I outline how I took these five themes and implemented them into three musical units: improvisation, composition, and soundscape.
Chapter Five

Phase Two Action Research

Introduction

I learned a great deal through my data collection from phase one. As I worked toward implementing CMM into my own teaching in a community music program, which I will refer to as Our Workshop, I decided to focus on the emergent themes from the case studies and to find ways to support or nurture these themes within my own program while keeping in mind my final research question and sub-questions:

As I work to infuse creative music making into my own context of a strings-based community music programme for elementary-aged students,

d. How do I incorporate creative music making?

e. How do students experience creative music making?

f. How does creative music making fit within the existing music learning of a community music programme?

g. How do different kinds of creative music making function in this context, and how does the context inform the pedagogy and students’ experiences?

I explored these questions through my action research phase by facilitating three CMM projects with my student participants: improvisation, composition, and soundscape. In reporting the action research phase, I first outline my initial reflection for each project, inspired by findings from phase one, then describe my actions and my post-action reflections.

Improvisation

Initial reflection. In my experience, students who are just learning a musical instrument may find improvisation overwhelming, but I believe that this is a crucial time to introduce the
concept. Musical improvisation is a process that can—and should—be nurtured across all school phases (Burnard & Boyack, 2017, p. 26). A major challenge for new improvisers is deciding on appropriate melodic contributions to an improvisation, while following the rhythm and tempo of the group, and I have observed that this uncertainty can lead to anxiety over “making mistakes.”

Teacher participants across the phase one cases indicated it was important to include improvisation into their CMM teaching. Across all sites, however, I did not observe many instances of improvisation, or I observed instances that did not appear meaningful—they were exercises added on to lessons that focused on other objectives. When I did see improvisation, student participants were extremely timid, which indicated to me that improvisation was contributing to anxiety in the classroom. My intention was to foster a culture of improvisation early on with Our Workshop, and to do so, I decided to improvise with the students in all lessons.

Some teacher participants in phase one attempted to navigate the students’ reluctance to improvise by placing parameters on their playing. I was impressed with Max’s use of the blues scale and blues form in his work with Site D, as the student participants picked up the concept very quickly. Max was always contextualizing the music he was presenting to his students. Max contextualized the blues scale, and blues form, by demonstrating popular songs that students could relate to. This act had another intended effect: to facilitate their listening. Max asked them to raise their hands when the “turnaround” of the blues form was heard. Before long, all students knew where the “turnaround” occurred in the form. Knowing the form contributed another

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3 The blues form is a 12-bar form of music, with a core standard harmonic progression. The blues scale, often played in blues music (but also in many other musics) also uses standard pitches. Max, as he was leading a transposing-instrument ensemble, used numbers to indicate scale degrees, rather than letter note names. This helped him facilitate sessions very efficiently, as it allowed students to transpose on the fly. After consultation with my fellow teachers, I chose to use letter note names, as I was facilitating a concert pitched ensemble.
parameter to enable students to feel secure in their improvisation. By using the blues form, and blues scale, combined with regular improvising activities, I hoped to help student participants navigate anxiety in Our Workshop.

**Action: Teaching the blues scale and blues form.** Through parts of three sessions, I taught the student participants the blues scale. To contextualize the form, I played examples from early rock n roll, including Little Richard (*Tutti Frutti, Good Golly Miss Molly*) and The Beatles (*Roll Over Beethoven*). As the students become more comfortable with the scale, I started to accompany on guitar, and asked students to first play the scale as a solo, then to try and improvise with it. I placed parameters (e.g., to only use half notes, or to use only notes on one string) at first, to keep the task manageable, and then asked for longer interpretations. The students generally remained engaged and were enthusiastic about each other’s creations. However, I found that they were not listening to the form.

**Reflection.** Some students were not engaging in improvising very enthusiastically. They played very quietly, and very little. In one instance, a student, Nicole, came to our session very upset, moody and would not engage with their classmates. Nicole had a turbulent home life, and presented a number of behavior challenges. When I asked how she was feeling, she responded that she was sad, angry, and frustrated all at the same time. I asked Nicole what she thought that feeling would sound like on her violin. After thinking only for a moment, she dug into the open G string, with a slow, grating scratch of the bow. The rest of the class laughed. It was perfect, and I told her so. Nicole replied, grumpily, “this is how I’m going to play from now on!” I asked her to continue to play in that way, slow and grating, but to also try and incorporate the D blues scale we had been practicing. When I joined her on my guitar with a 2-bar repeated minor chord progression, instead of the blues chords we had been playing, Nicole immediately fell into a
moody, feverish improvisation that left her classmates astounded. Nicole’s mood for the rest of the class was upbeat and proud, and she was encouraging of others to expand their own improvisation in “an angry way.”

**Action.** After this experience with the student, I abandoned the parameter of the blues form. I occasionally played the form with them, but I found that if I played single-chord harmony, or repeated chords in certain rhythmic and harmonic styles (or moods) students engaged much more meaningfully. Often, I asked students to suggest the mood (“let’s be hyper!”), colours (“play orange!”) or scenarios (“what would basketball sound like?”). I continued to ask that they focus their note choices on the blues scale as a parameter, which helped students feel confident in being able to contribute to the creative music making in class.

**Final reflection.** Our Workshop continued to include improvising as an element of CMM throughout the rest of the year, and students were engaged and supportive of each other. A colleague remarked how they noticed that students were offering feedback on some of their classmates’ playing, which was not observed in previous classes. Overall, I felt a sense of community was emerging through our improvisation activities, and wanted to reinforce it more with a stand-alone composition, written by Our Workshop students to be featured in our end of year performance.

**Composition**

**Reflection.** It was important for Our Workshop to feature student-created works on our end-of-year concert. Data gathered from phase one supported the theme that including students’ work in performance contributes to a sense of belonging, and students having something to offer. I also felt that composition was a great tool to engage students in collaborating.
The students at Our Workshop continued to be engaged by the blues scale, and enjoyed improvising with it. As the students still did not fully understand the blues form, I decided that a blues-based composition might be worth pursuing. Using a blues form would allow the students to include the improvisation skills they had developed into the piece, if they chose.

**Action.** In consultation with the other teachers, we separated Our Workshop into three smaller groups, of mixed instrumentation and ability. I asked if the students thought that writing a blues song would be fun for the concert. There were no dissenting opinions; everyone wanted to use their improv skills in the final performance. “Will we get a chance to do solos?” one student asked. It was decided then, that we would include a solo section somewhere in the piece.

I built on our improvisation exercises, and asked students to play short solos of two to four bars, using only the D blues scale. I wanted to get a number of two-bar riffs that we could arrange collectively, similarly to Max’s arranging process. After a solo, I would transcribe the music, using letters and rhythm notation on a whiteboard. The whiteboard was not music-specific, and did not have permanent staff lines, thus I could not efficiently write notation. This group had some ability in reading music, but I found that instead of writing using separate clefs (treble, alto, bass), using letter-names, fingerings, and simple rhythmic notation was applicable to all instruments (fig. 1). It was a quick transcription process, and had the benefit of not losing the attention of the students. The students then played each other’s riffs. We made no editing decisions at this stage.

![Figure 1 Example of the whiteboard composing process.](image)
Reflection. The small group sizes proved especially effective, as it allowed students to work collaboratively with relative ease. Collaboration seemed to occur naturally, with little input from me as facilitator. During one of our first composing sessions, one student performed a short solo comprised of dotted quarter-eighth note motifs, or, a Charleston rhythm⁴. I responded to it intuitively while accompanying on guitar. As each student joined in to improvise, they each featured the rhythm. This rhythm would become a central motif of their piece, and the students named it “Jenny’s riff.” Jenny was extremely proud of her contribution, and she was very generous with it, suggesting all students make their own theme, too. I asked her how we would make our own theme, and she suggested that her peers play the Charleston rhythm in one bar, and then make something of their own for the next bar.

Action. The experience with Jenny’s riff informed how Our Workshop would ultimately write the piece. We spent the rest of the session, and subsequent sessions, playing two-bar themes in this fashion, which I wrote on the board, and photographed to revisit. We wrote potential melodies for the piece, coming up with 17 different motifs, most starting with the Charleston rhythm I wrote each motif out for the next sessions, and had small groups (three groups total) play through with accompaniment. I decided that taking a vote on which riffs the students liked best would help us choose the main melody of the piece. Though the voting was close to unanimous, not all students’ contributions were voted in. I explained that all students were contributors to the process of writing this piece, and that even if their theme was not chosen, they inspired their peers. Anticipating some disappointment, a student spoke up: “That’s

⁴ A Charleston rhythm is a dotted quarter note, followed by an eighth note: [2′1 6′]
okay! This sounds GOOD! Also, I can’t remember what mine was.” Nods of agreement. “Yeah I don’t remember mine either!” I had forgotten to include names with each motif, and, after having a weekend pass in between sessions, the students could not pick their motif from any of the others.

**Reflection.** The voting experience left me chuckling. I had perhaps helped our collaborative decision-making by inadvertently creating a blind review for Our Workshop. I wondered if I had asked for the students to create too many riffs—the only riff that was attributed to any individual was the original Charleston riff. Ultimately, though, I observed that all students felt included, and that they felt the piece we were making was everyone’s creation. I took the chosen motifs, stitched them together using the blues form, and brought a draft, written for each clef. We had more themes than needed for the melody, but as we had used the blues scale, and a uniform rhythm (the Charleston), I was able to simply stack many of the themes into three-part harmony. I took note of some potential harmonic clashes, and was eager to discuss the piece with the students in the full ensemble.

**Action.** With the full ensemble present, I asked the other teachers to join our class, and to perform the piece written by Our Workshop. I wanted the students to hear the piece that they had created, played well to get them excited, and so that they could hear the harmonic clashes. I asked the students to think of anywhere the melody needed some editing. There was no response. I then utilized a method I observed from Reggie’s sessions and accentuated the harmonic clashes, and offered two suggestions to resolve. For example, the students had written the note C to be played over a G7 chord. Using the piano, I accentuated the sound of the C played against

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5 When seeing the piece printed on a score, one student asked if we had gotten it published. “My friend and I want to become publishers!” they explained. If given the time, a great learning extension of this project could be to include students in self-publishing the score and parts, and include their drawings for cover pages.
the B of the G7. They agreed it needed to be changed, and I offered that they choose either a B or a D instead of the C, taking a simple vote.

**Reflection.** At our staff meeting, I brought a draft of the piece for the teachers to look at. One of the first comments was about a mistake in the harmony. The students, as a function of using the blues scale, had opted to include a sharp-9 in their melody, which created tension against the major-third of the harmony. The sharp-9 chord (D7#9) was unfamiliar to some teachers; however, it is used frequently in the blues, so I defended its inclusion. This harmony would prove to be a point of contention for the remainder of the year, with some teachers insisting it needed to be changed. It was hard for the students to play the D7#9 in tune, and the first rehearsals sounded poor. Ultimately, the students liked the tension in the harmony, so we kept the chord as written.

There was much more musical material left over after creating the melody for the piece, and I was hesitant to discard the students’ creations. I asked a fellow teacher what he thought I should do, as I knew I would not have the time to go through the whole process of creating another piece, or to add to the one we had created. He suggested that I just write more material using their music and present it to them. I took the material, and again stitched it together, however, much of the music was difficult for some of our younger musicians to play. The cello section was particularly strong, as it was comprised of older students. With that in mind, I took most of the remaining music, and wove it into a cello soli (fig. 2). I brought it to the cello section, who were excited to play the rest of the music as a feature.
Action. Creating the cello soli had another unintended but fortuitous effect. As the cello section was musically strong, many of them had been given a lot of opportunity to play solos or be featured as part of performances. We had to make a decision as to who would improvise in the final concert, and the teaching team wanted to give opportunities to more students. As the cellos were featured with their soli, they were content with their participation in the song, and were happy to let other students be featured in the improvisation section.

Final reflection. The process of composing collectively was rewarding both to the students, as well as me. I felt that through this activity I had facilitated meaningful collaboration, teamwork, leadership and observed many instances of students being supportive of each other. With our final concert fast approaching, excitement was growing. As teachers, we asked who would like to be featured for the improvising section, and chose three students. Those who were not chosen were a little let down. Our final concert featured a dramatic element to it, and it struck me that we could include sections of group improvisation, to be featured as “soundscapes” for the action on stage.

Soundscapes

Reflection. I did not observe any free improvisation in phase one, but because of my own improvisation background, I was eager to include it in my work with Our Workshop. I felt that creating soundscapes might be a good entry point to free improvisation. Soundscapes are sonic
impressions of images, moods or thoughts (e.g. playing a musical impression of a forest). At Site C, I observed a teacher participant use a word-cloud to help students freestyle rap. In the session, the teacher wrote the word “winter” on the whiteboard and asked the student to give words that describe winter and winter activities (e.g., snow, fireplaces, Christmas). Using the word cloud, students could be guided to freestyle rap about the topic. Adding these parameters helped facilitate the engagement and helped students navigate anxiety over improvising. I felt that this technique could be effective to prompt free improvisation.

**Action.** Using the word cloud exercise, I wrote a number of topics on a whiteboard, and asked students to give descriptions and actions based on the word. After generating ideas, I first chose action words (e.g., skating) and asked students to play what they thought the action sounded like. In addition, I incorporated some of the hand signals that Max used during his sessions at Site D. These hand signals included directions for note variables of short/long (duration), loud/soft (dynamics), fast/slow (tempo), and hi/low (pitch). This exercise is effective in engaging the students, and all are eager to lead the group using the hand signals. Some very interesting soundscapes emerge, as well as extended techniques on the student instruments.

**Reflection.** In discussion with the other teachers of Our Workshop, it was decided that a soundscape be included into the final performance. The students had a dramatic element to the performance, and we felt that adding in a soundscape to underscore some of the drama onstage would be effective. This performance incorporated a time machine in the drama, and we thought that might be a good place to utilize the soundscape as sound effects for the machine taking off.

**Action.** In the next session, I asked students to try and play time machine sounds on their instruments. This exercise was not very successful, as students could not think of ways to produce what they thought a time machine would sound like. I had anticipated sounds like
“clank” or “whirr”, but they did not emerge. When I suggest the sounds, a student told me “that’s not what a time machine would sound like!”

**Reflection:** In discussion with the teachers, one teacher pointed out that students do not think of technology in mechanical terms, but rather as more screen or app-based, with little sound. If I had included a plan to ask students to describe a machine and how it works, I might have been more effective.

**Action:** The next session, I had the students draw pictures to show what they thought would happen when the time machine mishap occurs. Most students drew chaotic scenes with explosions or “zapping” scenes. I asked the students to play the picture on their instrument as I acted out pushing the button, getting zapped and exploding.

**Final reflection.** This session was much more successful. In subsequent rehearsals, it was important to include the dramatic aspect of the time machine exploding. When students were asked to simply play the time machine music, it was subdued and dynamically flat. When we invited an actor to writhe, jump and fall flat on the ground, indicating getting zapped into the time machine, the music was much more chaotic and dramatic. Having the dramatic cue also helped the students start and stop the time machine music without a conductor. Overall, the soundscape was only marginally successful. The students were confused at times on how to make abstract ideas into sounds. I had mostly concentrated on improvisation in a soloist setting, and not as free or group improvisation, and I believe that the students needed more exposure to free improvisation in order to create group improvisations for the soundscapes.

**Action Research Summary**

Through the CMM activities of improvisation, composition and soundscape, I observed many of the themes from phase one emerge in Our Workshop. Sense of belonging, something to
offer, and engagement were most prominent in this action research, with some elements of tensions between technical development and CMM evident. The space to explore creatively theme was most prominent in the soundscape activity, and was evidenced by a lack of space to explore group free improvisation. The space was lacking, as there was not sufficient time to incorporate exploratory activities in group improvisation. More time and space to explore group improvisation might have created a foundation for the students to better realize our soundscape.
Chapter Six

Discussion

In this chapter I discuss the themes that emerged during phase one and my action research with reference to current research and theory literature. This discussion is organized in terms of the phase one research questions: How are instructors prepared to teach creative music making? How do instructors conceptualize creative music making? What do instructors think are the benefits of creative music making? and How do instructors implement creative music making into their curriculum? I then discuss limitations of the study, implications and benefits of the study, areas for future research, and my conclusions.

How Are Instructors Prepared to Teach Creative Music Making?

Instructor participants were heavily influenced by their own music education with regard to their perceived ability to teach creative music making. Those instructors who had experience with CMM in their music education identified themselves as being confident in teaching CMM. Hickey (2012) writes that “because of the lack of exposure to composition in K-12 music classrooms, the natural proclivity and excitement towards composition fades as students go through formal music education” (p. 3). She explains that it is a self-perpetuating cycle, as teachers who are not exposed to CMM avoid teaching it in the classroom. Hickey’s identification that formal music education lacks CMM inclusion aligns with the teacher participants that were interviewed. Teacher participants that were exposed to CMM in their music education indicated that exposure to CMM did not occur in formal music education settings, but in community settings—in rock bands, with outside music teachers, and in community music contexts, such as jazz big bands. It was not until post-secondary music education that all participants engaged with CMM.
Improvising early was cited by some teacher participants as an early music education experience that enhanced their confidence in creative music making. Teacher participants spoke of music education environments that were welcoming, open, and encouraging towards their own improvisation. Higgins and Campbell (2010) suggest that we not think about improvisation as something done only by the archetypal expert or genius jazz musicians (e.g., John Coltrane) but that the dominant image of an improviser should be of anyone, including, perhaps especially, teachers. Musical improvisation is a process that can be nurtured across all school phases (Burnard & Boyack, 2017).

My own music education also played an influential role in my comfort with CMM. Similar to the teacher participants that I interviewed, creatively making music through informal musical experiences set the foundation for my own views of CMM—that anyone can and should make music creatively. In my action research, it was important that I instill a culture of CMM as an ordinary part of the music experience for my students. I observed that creating a culture of CMM helped my students become more open and confident improvisers and composers. This was emphasized in the experience with the student participant, Jenny, who felt safe enough to improvise with her classmates, even though she entered the class disengaged and upset. Whitcomb (2013) stated that improvisation activities allow children to express their feelings and ideas in musical ways and that it gives students an outlet to create unique and different musical expressions. Children (and teachers) may not feel comfortable to express these feelings, however, unless given the time and space to gain confidence in CMM.

Stringham, Thornton, & Shevock (2015) found pre-service music teacher educators voiced philosophical support for teaching creativity but few included composition or
improvisation pedagogy in coursework. It is possible that music teacher educators are no more comfortable teaching creative processes than the pre-service music teachers they prepare.

**How Do Instructors Conceptualize Creative Music Making?**

My research indicated two important elements within instructors’ conceptions of CMM: collaborative creativity and flow.

**Collaborative creativity.** Data showed that CMM as a group, or collaborative activity, was a prominent element in classrooms. Collaboration occurred not just between students, but also between teacher and students. Paynter (1975) conceived creative music making as giving students not only the freedom to devise and develop their own musical ideas, but also placing teachers in a position to find the freedom to develop theirs. Paynter wrote that it was the obligation of the music teacher to extend their professionalism by engaging in CMM with their students. In my own teaching, it may have been beneficial that I joined the class by improvising with them. Though my intent was to foster CMM in my students, by joining in CMM activities, we were creating a sense of community and belonging among all of us. Improvising music plays a key role in the “development of learners’ capacities to negotiate between multiple spheres—between the self and the world” (Burnard & Boynack, 2017, p. 28). There is a genuine synergy between received knowledge and inquiry, between social consensus and individual expression, between learner and community, and between the child’s world and the adult world (Custodero, 2007). This lends itself to a conceptualization of collaborative creativity in the context of group CMM learning as a shared learning experience, where individual and social creations and activities come together (Burnard, 2015). By placing myself alongside the students in our CMM activities, I was demonstrating that CMM was a shared activity, and that students’ creative input was directly influencing our sessions. This is an example of mutual engagement within a
community of practice (Wenger, 2008). As stated previously, “being included in what matters” (Wenger 1998, p. 74) and contributing to the joint enterprise is a key element of belonging to a community of practice. The students who experienced control over their musical experiences as composers, arrangers, improvisers, conductors and student leaders—both in Our Workshop and in the phase one programs—exemplified collaborative creativity, musical independence and musical leadership. This, in turn, supported creative agency in the students.

Our Workshop created their final end-of-year showcase composition in “musical blocks” of two-bar riffs that were assembled to create the final piece. Max asked his student to arrange their versions of selected tunes using riffs, and assemble them across the ensemble. Reggie asked students to compose musical blocks as well, though he arranged the blocks himself. Composers working in a collaborative style tend to assemble their musical works as each new idea is generated, tested, and selected (Glover, 2000). In these contexts, assembly and rehearsal are often interlinked CMM activities, and creators fill both composer and performer roles (Davis & Blair, 2011; Jaffurs, 2004).

There also were many instances (many, many instances) when I made mistakes in my playing, and I enjoyed apologizing for “messing up” the piece of music in a light-hearted manner. Bolden (2012) recalls cellist Yo-Yo Ma explaining (through a story of chef Julia Child’s dropping of a chicken) that one needs to welcome the first mistake. Bolden claims that creativity requires the expectation of failure. For students to succeed creatively, he argues, “they need to develop the confidence to create without worrying about what they are creating” (p. 3).

Demonstrating playfulness in our activities and that it was okay to make mistakes were important contributors to community building within the CCM context. Max demonstrated this by taking the musical riffs and “messing around” with them—putting different musical material
together by “mashing them up,” and Toby felt that by improvising and making grooves collaboratively students “got a kick” out of CMM. In both phases of this study, learning through CMM seems to be supported by co-creation, i.e., by the collaborative nature of creativity. Collaborative creativity is dependent on the trust students place in their community, which is fostered by peer-driven encouragement, and decision making (Burnard, 2015).

Play and playfulness has been the subject of some research of children’s music making activity, as it occurs outside the classroom. Marsh (1995) observed Australian children’s playground singing games, and suggested they provide rich contexts for creative music making. Marsh defines the activities as compositional, rather than improvisatory, observing that the children moved through an ongoing cycle of composition and performance. The activity was found to be one of co-creation, involving collaborative interactions. Tom’s account of CMM in a rock band context evoked a scenario of play—musicians jamming together, co-constructing songs in collaboration. Campbell (1995) described the social processes of young rock musicians collectively composing in an informal setting.

Other players watched, and listened, and then began to play along. At no time did the songwriter dictate what parts group members would play. Instead it was left to players to experiment with and to refine their parts over the course of repeated playing. (p. 18-19)

This observation bears similarity to how individuals learn in a play setting: watching, imitating, experimenting, joining and constructing experience.

**Flow.** Participants interviewed talked about the experience of “jamming out” in their CMM experiences. Jamming out occurred in informal music experiences such as band practice, and improvisation. The description of jamming out was characterized by making music with a group, completely immersed in the process and responding to each other’s musical output. This
description is seen in what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) called “flow”—a state of intense focus that is a deeply involving and enjoyable experience. Though Csikszentmihalyi discusses flow with respect to happiness, his description is very close to the concept of wellbeing. His studies on flow, and on the connections between flow and creativity, indicate that creativity (and CMM in particular) has strong potential to contribute to students’ wellbeing.

I observed the state of flow in the observation with Nicole, during which she became intensely engaged in our improvisation, to the point of changing her angry, disengaged mood to one that was more upbeat, and encouraging to others. There were more instances of flow affecting the overall mood of the classroom, particularly when we were engaged in CMM that students were directing, such as coming up with composing riffs, improvising, and leading the group in arranging.

Placing parameters on students’ CMM activities was observed throughout the study as an effective way to keep students engaged and in (or close to) a state of flow. Wiggins (1999) claims that certain CMM parameters can obstruct creativity by being too restrictive, suggesting instead to choose just one parameter—a broad overarching idea—and allow students to make their own decisions about other musical elements. Creativity was supported by the addition of more parameters in my study. Using the blues scale and form for improvisation, for example, allowed students to create longer musical phrases than in instances when we engaged in unstructured free improvisation. There were instances when interesting ideas emerged as students were asked to create in free improvisation settings, however, the music was often tentative and ambiguous. According to Elliott and Silverman (2015), creativity and the musical flow experience occurs when the challenge of a musical activity is well matched to the
individual’s abilities. As I had not properly supported free improvisation early in Our Workshop, students were not prepared to make impactful creative music with few parameters guiding them.

**What Do Instructors Think are the Benefits of Creative Music Making?**

Instructor opinions of the benefits of CMM mirrored what I observed in the action research phase of my study. Sense of belonging, something to offer, community, and self-identity were themes that emerged across the data.

**Sense of belonging, something to offer, and community.** Throughout the study, the themes of sense of belonging, something to offer and community building were among the most prominent benefits of CMM that emerged. Research reveals that children working with ideas collaboratively recognize one another’s ideas and build these into personal and collective responses to tasks (Burnard & Boyack, 2017). In this study, the process of collaborative idea recognition promoted a sense of belonging and community, as well as validated students’ sense that they had something to offer the class. This collaboration further led to engagement in the classroom. Engagement both observed, and described by instructor participants, was often social, rather than musical. The connections and friendships students had made over the course of their participation at each site drove them to continue attending the programs, and participating in the music activities. Mohenan (2016) observed a similar trend of engagement, also citing that the social participation, combined with CMM, was the prime reason some students engaged at all. “We wanted to belong to the cool group that made songs” (p. 273), identified a student of Mohenan’s study.

Collaborative creation fortifies the feeling of togetherness and group-belonging documented in collaborative products (Bruner, 1996; Sawyer, 2011; Wenger, 1998). This further solidified the communities of practice of Our Workshop. Such collaborative products, even when
local or modest, are equally identity-bestowing, and may “give pride, identity, and a sense of continuity to those who participate, however obliquely, in their making” (Bruner, 1996, p. 22). This was observed across all sites in phase one, and there was a similar sentiment among Our Workshop participants, who explained that their composition gave a sense of pride in Our Workshop’s identity. Burnard (2015) found that “togetherness and co-creation in particular can be seen as contributors to pupils’ wellbeing, as are the similar concepts of a sense of belonging” (p. 385). Burnard explains that these concepts are conceptualized by Soini et al. (2010) as elements that enhance pupils’ pedagogical wellbeing.

**Self-identity.** O’Toole (2005) argues that a primary reason for music making is identity affirmation. I observed at each site that students “us[ed] music as a part of shaping self-identity” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 112), such as when students contributed emotional affiliation to certain CMM activities. They were also “affirming and exploring identity” (Karlsen, 2011, p. 113), for instance when students would identify as guitarist or singer. Participating in or withdrawing from CMM can shape and clarify students’ individual and collective identities (MacDonald & Miell, 2002). Some students were peripheral participants to the CMM activities in Our Workshop, and to the activities I observed as part of the various programs in phase one. However, all students indicated feelings of belonging to the resulting musical creations. Lave and Wenger (1991) conceive legitimate peripheral participation as a way to describe the relationship between new members and veteran members in a community of practice. As newcomers observe and interact within the community, they learn what it means to be an active member of the community and take on identities of mature practitioners. As they participate in the community, practitioners maintain ties to tradition but also discover new practices, and the community changes. Peripheral participation may be seen as an active form of individual agency, yet it may also be seen as a
form of self-protection (Karlsen, 2011), in that they do not want to be excluded from the group. If agency is seen as a “person’s capacities to have an influence in the course of events” (Barnes, 2000, p. 25), agency can also be supported by letting students be followers, who reflect or use experiences afterward, in a different way. In a community of practice, multiple and dynamic roles are present (Wenger, 1998) including active leaders and peripheral participants. The importance, then, is of teachers knowing students in depth, how they dynamically move between roles, and considering how to ensure individual growth in each situation.

**How Do Instructors Implement Creative Music Making Into Their Curriculum?**

Instructors in both phases of my research implemented CMM through facilitation-style teaching. In all instances, facilitators had to be mindful of the balance between CMM and technical development in music.

**Facilitation.** In the most successful instances of CMM in Our Workshop, I was not actively “in charge” of the class, but was responding musically with either a guitar or piano. I was active as what Higgins and Campbell (2010) describe as a facilitator. Facilitation aligns with the concept of collaborative music making and of the workshop—inviting people to join together in creating music collectively through events in various contexts (Higgins & Campbell 2010, p. 6). I observed that teachers of CMM were also using a facilitation model, rather than a teacher-student method. In the sessions that I observed, the instructors included student ideas and guided each session based on what the students liked best. Generally, they had a skeleton lesson plan to orient the session, but often the session evolved in ways they did not plan.

The rich CMM tools and skills that the instructors in my study possessed helped CMM facilitation, and the role teachers played in being creative themselves encouraged creativity in students. Sawyer (2011) describes teaching as an improvisational activity that requires
interactive relationships between members in the learning community. Cremin and Barnes (2018) explain that a key thread in these relationships is to ensure the creative involvement of the teacher, which is central to the creative development of children, and cultivates a culture of creativity. Relationships are cultivated through facilitation (Hickey 2015), affirmation, and celebration (Odendaal et al., 2014). In this study, these relationships were found to be cultivated in a similar fashion, resulting in a safe space for student to explore CMM. Small explained,

> We learn, from the sounds and from one another, the nature of the relationships; in affirming we teach one another about the relationships; and in celebrating we bring together the teaching and the learning in an act of social solidarity. (Small, 1998, p. 218)

**Balance between technique and CMM.** In my study, I identified balancing technical development in music as an area of concern when implementing CMM into music education. Teacher participants felt that in order for students to feel confident in their creative music making, they needed to feel they could succeed in playing their instruments, and to read music to communicate their composing ideas. In my sessions with Our Workshop, I generally focused on warmups with various scales (blues, pentatonic, major) to facilitate technical development. In instances where students would not engage with improvisation, students indicated that they did not feel confident in certain aspects of playing their instrument, such as string crossing, or certain fingerings of the scales. Research indicates that technical proficiency can help students feel more free to engage with their musical ideas (Campbell, 2009).

Technique is valued as an important contributor to meaningful CMM. In interviewing prominent pedagogues of CMM, Hickey (2015) found that “all [are] facile technicians on their instruments and [all] noted the importance of this for successful free improvisation” (p. 439). They were able to express their musical selves in the moment using the technical and aural skills
they had honed up to that point. However, as informal-learning researchers have found, only simple technical skills on an instrument are prerequisite to playing music (Green, 2008).

Some teacher participants indicated that it was important to abandon a preconceived idea of musical quality in order to succeed in CMM. Through my study it was found that community building within the ensemble was more important to CMM success than having technically advanced students. Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010) found this kind of music making supports the tenets of assessment in informal learning: “[In CMM] students began to experience the issue of how to judge difference without having to regress to ready-made criteria” (p. 77). The researchers indicate that without predetermined material (such as notated music, or memorized “licks”) to fall back on, students are forced to make their own sense of the music they are creating, and to decide what sounds “good” or not. In Our Workshop, I observed that students made collective judgements about what music to include in their composition, while at Site C, students created grooves independently by jamming together until something cohesive emerged, often without any verbal interaction. In these instances, students were assessing their creative products independently.

**Revisiting the Conceptual Framework**

In this section, the conceptual frameworks Communities of Practice and Musicking are reviewed with relation to the discussion questions and the findings.

**Communities of Practice.** As stated previously, communities of practice are comprised of a joint enterprise, shared repertoire, mutual engagement, multi-membership, and brokering. The results from this study indicated that joint enterprise, mutual engagement, shared repertoire were most prominent across the data in both phases, as well as the literature surrounding creative music making. Within this study, the joint enterprise consisted of the various music programmes
themselves, and shared repertoire was represented by the musical interests and knowledge of the students and teachers. Mutual engagement was the most prominent indicator of a community of practice in creative music making, as the data showed that, for students, “being included in what matters” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74), led to an increased sense of belonging, engagement, and affirmation that they had something to offer.

**Musicking.** Community building through music making is an element of musicking (Small, 1998). When students were given the space to explore creatively, they were also provided the space to build their musical community. By offering the space to engage in CMM, teachers gave the students the space, as Small explains as musicking, to explore, affirm and celebrate who they are in relation to fellow humans and to the world (1987).

The tension between technical development and CMM was highlighted when viewing through the lens of musicking, particularly with regards to performance preparation. The findings of this study indicated that as students were guided to focus on upcoming performances, the space to explore creatively and to understand self was diminished.

**Summary of Findings**

With regard to the question of how instructors are prepared to teach creative music making, my research showed that experiences with CMM in their own music education played a crucial role in preparing instructors. Instructors conceptualized CMM as activities that develop agency for people through collaborative music creation, that have the benefit of creating a sense of belonging, while giving students the opportunity to contribute to their community. The implementation of CMM seems to rely on connecting students to their wider community, which is achieved in part through incorporating their own musical tastes and experiences. Instructors
indicated that balancing the learning goals of technical development with creative music making and exploration was an ongoing challenge.

Limitations

Although important findings have emerged from this study, there were constraints to this study’s design and analysis. These limitations include the length of time in the field collecting observations, the selection process for teacher participants, and my own researcher and teacher bias influencing observations and analyses. The number of teacher interviews could have been greater. Additionally, I did not interview any students for their reflections on creative music making. Student input regarding the nature of CMM activities in phase one would have shed light on the important question of how students perceive creative music making. I did include informal student input into my action research phase, but a formal student data collection effort, such as a focus group, could have added more depth to my action research reflections. An alternate data collection method for student views in phase two, such as photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), would have been beneficial. This study might also have benefitted from additional researcher observation in phase one, and especially in phase two, where an outside perspective on my own teaching would have proved very useful. This could also have been accomplished in an informal way, by asking my colleagues to give me notes. However, the resources of Our Workshop limited the ability of other teachers to attend many of my sessions.

Benefits and Implications of This Study

Findings from this research have the potential to benefit educators, parents, students, and researchers. Educators and parents will gain knowledge of how particular creative music making pedagogies function to nurture the themes outlined above, thereby informing teaching and parenting practices and decisions. Students will ultimately benefit through opportunities to
engage in programming informed by evidence-based understandings of creative music making activities. Researchers will benefit by learning how creative music making functions within a community music education program.

Implications from the findings in this study suggest that creative music making practices should be enduring, rather than short and limited. The free improvisation activities in particular required more foundation for students to realize the potential for group free-improvisation.

**Further Research**

In terms of future research, the role of the facilitator in situated practices of creative music making needs to be studied and discussed in context with the pupil participants. How is the relationship between facilitator and student dependent on the success of CMM activities? Future researchers might also be interested in examining what “success” means in terms of CMM activities. Assessment of creativity measures could be applied to observations of CMM workshops. Research about quality and assessment, and even development, of CMM is needed in order to help pre-service and in-service teachers develop and support these ensembles within their music classes.

This study examined CMM mainly from the perspectives of teachers. The student musicians were mostly comfortable in these programs, and seemed to enjoy the experience working with their instructors. It would be interesting to examine which teachers and teaching methods students felt helped them create. Do students who enjoy and thrive in CMM activities have particular personality traits? These and other questions related to the experience of, and perspectives from, CMM students warrant further research.

Collaborative creation, or collaborative creativity, may facilitate the building of meaningful and enduring learning experiences within music education. Research examining the
role collaboration has on creative outcomes could be beneficial. Creativity, as viewed as a cultural construct (Burnard, 2012), could be studied with regard to collaborative creativity, and how students can be creative and experience creative agency in multiple ways.

There is a need for more systematic inquiry of creative music making in order to guide music teachers and their students. Research into specific forms of CMM (e.g., composition, non-idiomatic improvisation) could provide insight to the nuances of each activity. Free improvisation education in particular continues to lack any consensus in methodology (Hickey, 2015).

**Conclusion**

Creative music making has the potential to develop agency in students through engagement, a sense of belonging, a sense of having something to offer their community, being given the space to explore creatively, and to strengthen their musical skills. CMM should be included in all music education endeavors, with an emphasis on its inclusion in early music education. This study was a transformative experience for me, as both researcher and educator. My abilities as a CMM facilitator have been strengthened by observing the work of the fine educators that invited me into their communities. Interviews proved to be eye opening and inspiring, and left me excited to share my learning with my own music community.

The students I worked with in Our Workshop were exciting, caring, fun, and intelligent people. The creative music making we engaged in together was a rewarding experience, and we were fortunate to share it with our families, friends, and the broader community. Our Workshop is fortunate to be granted the opportunity to celebrate our music on a professional stage that is acoustically rich. The students are treated as young professional artists by the theatre’s technical
and front of house staff, who all contributed to put on a top-notch concert for over 300 attendees.

I conclude this paper with a reflecting vignette on our final performance:

Probably the hardest, and most nerve wracking, part of a performance is waiting backstage. It is dark and quiet, save for the person under the spotlight introducing the show, and thanking those who contributed to its production. I am waiting with around 30 kids, who are doing an excellent job keeping their excitement, and nervousness (mostly) under wraps. We’ve practiced this, being backstage. We know that all our friends and family are just beyond the stage door, and that the acoustics of this theatre will carry the slightest giggle all the way to the back of the hall, where Uncle Joey is waiting with his iPhone poised for our entrance. We want to show everyone how professional we are, just like the performers we’ve watched on YouTube, and the shows we’ve been invited to attend over the year. Performances by people who have visited our class, who gave us a big smile, and a tiny wave from when they were on stage—this same stage!

Finally, we hear clapping. A lot of clapping.

“I’m really nervous, Sean!” a first-year student whispers.

“So am I,” I tell the student “but we’re going to be great!” I’m confident we will.

The stage door opens. It is one student’s responsibility to lead the ensemble on stage—an honour she performs with pride, leading us with one of the largest smiles that theatre has seen.

I have a good seat for the show. We are supporting our friends on stage as a backing band comprised of piano, bass and drums. The performance has been designed as a mash-up of a musical theatre piece and orchestral concert combined. There are some orchestral songs, some drama, some singing. A set has been constructed with a large
three-piece canvas (a triptych), painted with the help of the students of Our Workshop’s school. The show starts with a vocal piece, one that the students had written with the help of a local composer, Reggie. The students sound great, and the excitement of singing their very own song onstage is evident.

As the show continues, the time machine emerges (constructed from refrigerator boxes, also with the help of the school community) and faint sounds from the orchestra foreshadow the impending dramatic mishap. As the time machine malfunctions, the orchestra explodes into a flurry of sound, while the stage is flooded with lighting effects and then to black. “That was so cool!” a cello player tells me, taken by surprise. We had not told them that the lighting operator on stage would respond to their soundscape. Soft blue light illuminates the stage as a violin player begins an improvised solo. We begin the blues-based composition, which has evolved into a funky groove representing a sabre tooth tiger cruising the open fields of the ice age. The piece features three soloists total, each improvising with confidence. One soloist had told me prior that she had memorized “a few sounds” so that she wouldn’t get too nervous and not know what to play.

The final piece is another vocal piece, with words that describe friendship, being together and welcoming others. As it finishes, the theatre erupts into a standing ovation, and the students are visibly proud, and satisfied that they have accomplished an outstanding performance. We exit the stage, and I congratulate them, but don’t keep them—their families, and cookies, are waiting. As we walk to the lobby, families greet the students with hugs and praise. One parent exclaims, “Why didn’t you tell me that you had a solo?!” to one of the featured improvisers.

“I wanted to surprise you!” he tells his mom, as she gives him a big hug.
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APPENDIX A: Letters of Information

Study Title: Teaching creative music: A case-study and action research examination of practices in creative music education.
Name of Student Researcher: Sean Corcoran, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University
Name of Supervisor: Dr. Ben Bolden, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University

Dear Parent/Guardian,

You are receiving this invitation because your child is part of the <NAME OF PROGRAMME> program at <LOCATION>.

What is this study about?
The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of creative music education on student music learning. Creative music includes music that is improvised or made-up by the students themselves.

What does participation involve?
Your child will be observed in music class, for approximately four two-hour observation sessions over the course of one week. The researcher, Sean Corcoran, will make general field notes about student engagement with musical activities, and there will be no identifying information recorded. There are no known risks involved and no direct benefits to participants.

Is participation voluntary?
Your child’s participation in the study is voluntary. If you do NOT wish your child to be involved with this study, please return the attached form to <NAME OF PROGRAMME ADMINISTRATOR>, <NAME OF PROGRAMME>. Student participants can request I do not observe them at any point up to the actual observation. After that time I will not be able to remove student participant data as I will not be able to separate individual data. No reasons are necessary and there will be no negative consequences. If you do not wish your child to be observed for this research, please inform Sean Corcoran, researcher, at (613) 929-2594 or sean.corcoran@queensu.ca, before <FIRST DATE OF OBSERVATIONS> and your child will not be observed.

What will happen to observations of your child?
Only the researcher, Sean Corcoran, and supervisor, Dr. Ben Bolden, will have access to the observation data. Data will be kept securely on an encrypted device for a minimum of five years, then destroyed securely. This research will be published as part of a master’s thesis, and possibly in education journals. Findings from this study may be presented at conferences. No identifying information about students, teachers, schools or music programs will be in the report and/or presentations.

What if you have questions or concerns about the study?
For questions about the study, please contact either Sean Corcoran, researcher at sean.corcoran@queensu.ca, (613) 929-2594, or Dr. Ben Bolden, supervisor at ben.bolden@queensu.ca or (613) 533-6000 x 77762. If you have any ethics concerns, contact General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at 1-844-535-2988 (Toll free in North America) or chair.GREB@queensu.ca (1-613-533-2988 if outside North America).
Teaching Creative Music Parent / Guardian Consent Form

Dear Parent / Guardian,

Please read the information accompanying this consent form.

I have read and understood the request for my child to participate in the study Teaching creative music: A case-study and action research examination of practices in creative music education.

☐ I DO NOT give permission for my child to participate in the questionnaires.

This consent form is to be completed and returned to <PROGRAMME ADMINISTRATOR>, <PROGRAMME NAME> ONLY if consent has NOT been provided to participate in this study. Please keep a copy of this information for your records.

Name of Child (please print): Age: Name of Parents/Guardian (please print):

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date:
Study Title: Teaching creative music: A case-study and action research examination of practices in creative music education.

Name of Student Researcher: Sean Corcoran, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University
Name of Supervisor: Dr. Ben Bolden, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University

I am Sean Corcoran, a master’s student in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University, working under Dr. Ben Bolden. I am asking community music educators to take part in a study of the effectiveness of creative music education in community music programmes. If you agree to take part, I will interview you for one hour at a public location you choose about your experiences of creative music teaching. The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. I will also observe you working with your students for approximately four two-hour observation sessions over the course of a week. There are no known risks for taking part in this study. While there are no direct benefits to you as a participant, study results will help inform how creative music can be incorporated into community music programmes.

There is no obligation for you to say yes to take part in this study. You don’t have to answer any questions you don’t want to. You can stop participating at any time without penalty. You may withdraw from the study up until February 28, 2019 by contacting me at sean.corcoran@queensu.ca. You can request I do not observe you at any point up to the actual observation.

I will keep your data securely for at least five years, then destroy the data securely. Your confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible by replacing your name with a pseudonym for all data and in all publications. The code list linking real names with pseudonyms will be stored separately and securely from the data on an encrypted device. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data.

I hope to publish the results of this study in my master’s thesis and academic journals and present them at conferences. I will include quotes from some of the interviews when presenting my findings and describe some of my observations. However, I will never include any real names with quotes or descriptions, and I will do my best to not include information that could indirectly identify participants. During the interview, please let me know if you say anything you do not want me to quote, and let me know if there is anything you do not want me to observe.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me, Sean Corcoran, at sean.corcoran@queensu.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Ben Bolden at ben.bolden@queensu.ca or 613-533-6000 ext. 77762. If you have any ethics concerns please contact the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at 1-844-535-2988 (Toll free in North America) or chair.GREB@queensu.ca. Call 1-613-533-2988 if outside North America.

This Letter of Information provides you with the details to help you make an informed choice. All your questions should be answered to your satisfaction before you decide whether or not to participate in this research study. Keep one copy of the Letter of Information for your records and return one copy to the researcher, Sean Corcoran.

By signing below, I am verifying that:
I have read the Letter of Information and all of my questions have been answered.

Name of Participant: _____________________

I consent to being audio-recorded for this interview

Signature: ____________________________________________ Date: __________________________
## APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol and Questions

### Basic Information About Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of interview:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewer:</td>
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<td>Interviewee:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Position of Interviewee:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recording/storing information:</td>
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</tbody>
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### Introduction:

- Introduce myself
- Discuss purpose of study
- Get informed consent signature
- Ask if interviewee has any questions
- Define necessary terms
Interview Questions

1. How have you experienced creative music in your professional career?

2. What experience did you have with creative music in your education?
   
   a) At what point in your education did you first become aware of creative music, i.e., composition and improvisation?

3. How have you experienced creative music making in your teaching career?

4. In your experience, how do creative music making opportunities impact students?

5. How can creative music education complement other music teaching approaches?

6. What challenges do you think creative music presents in an orchestral strings setting?
   
   a) What are some instrument-specific challenges?

Closing

- Thank interviewee
- Assure confidentiality
- Describe member checking procedure.
- Comment on receiving results, and if they are wanted
APPENDIX C: Student Assent Script

Student assent script: Introductory information to be read aloud before I begin the first observation.

Hello, I am Sean Corcoran, a master’s student at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. I am doing a project on how kids create their own music in music programmes like this one. I will be here for the next week, watching how your group makes music together. I hope to get some ideas from the work you do here that will help students in other programmes make music together too.

I won’t write down any of your names, or take any pictures of your classes. No one will be able to identify you in my project, as I will make up different names to describe what I watched in your class.

You don’t have to be a part of this project. If you don’t want me to observe what you are doing, you can let me, or your teacher know now, or in private later on, but make sure you do it before I start my observation, as I won’t be able to separate you from my work afterward.

Thank you for letting me be a part of your class and I can’t wait to hear your wonderful music making!
APPENDIX D: Recruitment email

Email to administrators of music programmes

Hello

I am writing to you as the director of ____________.

I obtained your email address from the organization website/colleague/other means.

I am Sean Corcoran, a master’s student in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. I am asking community music educators to take part in a study of creative music education in community music programmes.

If you agree to take part, I will ask you to send recruitment information to your teachers and the parents of your students (please see attached information letters).

For more information, please contact me at sean.corcoran@queensu.ca or Dr. Ben Bolden, supervisor at ben.bolden@queensu.ca or (613) 533-6000 x 77762.

Thank you for your consideration.
### Ipad ensemble

3:38 Instructor asks them to make a “DJ” set.
Discussing “original music

3:38 instructor asks student to start a beat on ipad. Asking students to explore different sounds. playing with chordal sounds on ipad, one beats one on chords/bass sound Instructor is conducting.

Split into 3 different ipad ensembles of approx. 8 students
One teacher is playing cello (impov) overttop of the ipad group. Includes both stringed instruments and ipads. Some students make beats and some use pre-set harmony in the program...Students collaborate no conductor...seems to lock in students looking at each other

Groups all work independently of each other. A lot of collaboration, but some students are fixated on the ipad, not the group playing. Some students play along with violins, though get ‘embarrassed’ and don’t finish. Not much verbal communication regarding music-only how to run garageband.

3:51 Piece settles to playing A minor, short rhythmic improvisations on open A string with string instruments

3:52 students figuring out new beat for ipad. Student writes a rhythm, in quarter and eighth notes, and all sing, “ta ta titi’, then they translate it into an ipad and play the rhythm. “hey I like your beat!” one student says to another

3:55 rhythm on ipad is a little complicated for string players. Playing open A along with it to get it down. Student helping other: ‘watch me’

3:56 incorporating the student composed rhythm into the improvisation. Adding some fingering, still in A minor though not clear if the strings are playing... experimenting into what sounds “right”. Student says C# doesnt sound right-low-2 fingering shown by other student.

4:00 teacher then explains low 2 (c natural) is part of scale.
4:03 Students record the ensemble piece. Iphone recording. Listen back to recording. Bad sound quality
4:03 break and snack.

### Winds sectional

4:07 space issue as classroom teacher is having parent meeting. Shared space with the school is an obvious frustration with the teachers
4:09 Learning of new piece specifically written for the group. Composer has used the idea of one student as the basis for the written piece. Student is beaming with pride about the revelation, teacher allows student to talk about their choice. “Would be cool to be in two places at once—like split yourself. You could be in the summer as well as the rain”—student.
Sectional has all winds and brass. About 5 students.

4:11 Teacher using solfege and asks students to play fa mi re do, learning material by rote.
4:14 Position 1/2/3.. Uses numbers for rest, ready and playing position. Lot of teacher-driven instruction.
4:15 Using phone backing track to play along as a rhythm section, no external speaker.


4:19 Teacher explains how to feel the tempo and play in groups of 3.


4:22 Learning how short an eighth note is by practicing playing short together. Trying to play short together. Reading the rhythm on page and relating to reading through rests.

4:26 Students play along with the recorded piece.

4:27 Listening to entire orchestra recording (MIDI).

4:28 Student notices pattern in music, teacher lets them explain where the pattern is. Teacher asks what the students think music sounds like, Students talk about what they think the music sounds like. Excited discussion. One says it sounds like horse race. Another says Electronic royal wedding.

4:31 Teacher asking student what they are thinking about when listening to piece.

4:33 Teacher has woodwinds conduct the brass of next piece, while the brass sing rhythm of the piece. Switch. Exploring tempi. Decide on a good one to practice maybe get faster for performance.
APPENDIX F: OUR WORKSHOP COMPOSITION

Sabertooth Blues

[Music notation image]
TEACHING CREATIVE MUSIC

Vln.

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

Cb.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

Cb.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc. 1

Vc. 2

Cb.