

**Creating Intrinsic Motivation Through Joy:
Facilitating Positivity and Happiness in the Band Room**

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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in Teaching
Western Oregon University

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

College of Education

MASTER'S DEGREE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Completion Term: Spring 2026

Type of exit requirement: Action Research Project

The supervisory committee met with the candidate for a final evaluation in which all aspects of the candidate's program were reviewed. The committee's assessment and recommendations are:

Recommendations:

- ✓ Degree should be awarded

Recommendations:

- ✓ Exit Requirement has been approved
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Abstract

This research explores the idea that creating an inclusive classroom built on joy can inspire students to create their own intrinsic motivation. This research provides evidence to the statement that students that feel more accepted and welcome in the community of the band room will be more excited to come to class and participate everyday. This research was conducted in an intermediate seventh grade band classroom in a suburban middle school in Oregon. I utilized techniques of call and response, consistent positive encouragement and affirmations, use of humor, and opportunities for student agency in this research study. The most important finding of this study was that students reacted positively to the use of daily humor at the beginning of every lesson that allowed them to share, and possibly lead, a moment of levity with their peers. This use of levity helped to build trust and a sense of community with the students which allowed my instruction to be more impactful.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank Lavell Kamma, Joseph Spaniola, and Gary “Sandy” Spivey for providing their musical guidance that set me on the life path of music that I have chosen. Lavell was my first saxophone instructor that instilled my passion for music at a young age. Without Lavell, I would be a different person on a different path. Joseph and Sandy were both professors in the music department when I attended the University of West Florida that helped to build my confidence as a person and as a performer.

I also want to thank my parents and my girlfriend Vanessa for helping to support and encourage me throughout this process. I would also like to thank Amy Bowden and Evan Macwilliams for their feedback and assistance in the process of completing this project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I want to explore the idea that creating an inclusive classroom built on joy will inspire my students to create their own intrinsic motivation. With this research, I hope to prove that students that feel more accepted and welcome in the community of the band room will be more excited to come to my class everyday. Through this personal excitement and joy, my students will be inspired to practice and develop their personal musicianship and passion for music.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines inclusivity as “including everyone...including and accommodating people who have historically been excluded (as because of their race, gender, sexuality, or ability)” (Merriam- Webster, n.d.). I chose to research these ideas of inclusivity built on joy because I have had a lot of varied academic experiences with music that haven’t always been positive. My high school band director was more focused on winning competitions than teaching music and supporting his students and both of the universities I attended both created hierarchical communities that were highly exclusionary.

My first impactful experience as a student took place in the karate class at my father’s martial arts dojo in Gainesville, Florida and it taught me the importance of community, discipline, and the empowerment gained from participating in a shared experience. This early experience, from age three to seventeen, provided me with an example of how an inclusive community with a common goal could positively affect the lives of its participants. The dojo was, and still is, a community that is open and supportive to anyone that wishes to be a part of it. My ideas for the inclusive community I hope to shape my future music program into are based on my early experiences in martial arts. The majority of my childhood was spent in a karate gi, and my earliest memories are in my father’s dojo and at karate tournaments. We travelled a lot to different tournaments and were very involved in the martial arts community. During this time, I

met a lot of other martial artists that shared similar experiences and values towards the creation and continuation of inclusive martial arts communities. I also helped my father run self defense seminars and annual karate tournaments from age ten to seventeen which taught me how to instruct large groups of people in a single action and how to organize and run large events .

I had my first independent teaching experience at the dojo from age fifteen to seventeen when I took over the lead instructor position for the hour and a half adult karate class on Wednesday nights. This experience taught me that “real wealth is not the possession of property but the recognition that our deepest need, as human beings, is to... relate to other human beings” (Boggs, 2012, P.51). My various experiences through martial arts, like tournaments and self defense seminars, provided support for this idea that people need to relate to others and feel accepted in a community. I really enjoyed this teaching experience and it helped set the foundation for my eventual choice to become a teacher. I liked the feeling of leading a group of people in an activity that I felt passionate about and they were interested in learning. I did not consider a future as a teacher at this point in my life because I never wanted to work in the Florida school system. These values of community empowerment and shared positive experience helped form my pedagogical approach and who I am as a person.

My second impactful experience as a student took place in the home of a musician named Lavell Kamma and it taught me the importance and power of joy and its integral part in the musical process. This experience provided me with a prime example of the organic happiness and joy that I want to instill in my future music program. It also provided me with my second example of how inclusivity and acceptance can positively change someone's life. Before taking lessons with Lavell, I had taken some guitar lessons and quickly lost interest. In hindsight I might have been too young for lessons or maybe the guitar teacher just didn't understand how to

reach me. I started playing the alto saxophone when I was ten years old with Lavell as my teacher and I firmly believe that if I had started taking saxophone lessons with anyone else I probably wouldn't have stuck with it and I would be an entirely different person.

Learning from Lavell was the first time I encountered someone that exuded an overwhelming sense of joy and fulfillment from playing or teaching music. I could see the happiness in his eyes when he was talking to me about music and I was starting to understand what he was saying. His sense of happiness and joy are what inspired me to pursue my current research. Lavell did not have the formal education or pedagogical understanding to really give me the musical foundation that I would learn later in my academic journey but he instilled an expressive passion for music and a feeling of joy from it that would guide me for the rest of my life. I want to transfer the feeling of joy that this experience instilled in me into the creation of an inclusive and welcoming music classroom that utilizes culturally appropriate visual representation and audio content in its curriculum planning.

Lessons with Lavell were also the first time that I encountered ideas of racism that I didn't yet understand. Lavell was a Black man born in the American south and had been a self-taught musician for over two decades touring the chitlin circuit during the 1960s and 70s. I met him when he was somewhere in his sixties and took lessons from him for about two years. I think I was Lavell's first White student. I remember a particular story that he told me about when he started to notice White college students sneaking into his shows when he could only perform in non-White venues and now I, a ten year old White child in a Scooby Doo shirt, was sitting in his house. I did not fully understand what these conversations meant at the time but these stories and conversations would help form my future understanding of racial inequity and the need for inclusivity in our society and in our classrooms.

My middle school music experience was great because my director fostered community based on fun and his personal love for music. The community of the band room felt welcoming and my director was able to balance joy and instruction really well which prepared me for my next musical steps in high school. I played in the general band and the jazz band and, after a year of taking saxophone lessons with Lavell, music quickly became my favorite class of the day. My prior knowledge and feeling of joy that Lavell impressed on me inspired a sense of deep curiosity that helped me create my own motivation and passion for music. I also really liked my middle school band director because I felt like he was very relatable and he cared about what he was teaching.

High school was a bit of a different musical experience. My high school band director was more focused on winning marching band competitions than on actually playing and teaching music. He would throw tantrums and be visibly disappointed in us when we did not place as well as he was hoping we would in competitions. He did not understand how to connect with his students and he created a negative environment that pushed his students away from the reason they were there. I remember seeing this toxic environment extinguish the joy and passion for music in many of my friends. This was a polar opposite of my previous musical experiences in middle school and with Lavell and it would serve as my first example of how a toxic environment, motivated by competition and hierarchy, that is devoid of a strong sense of positive community can extinguish students' musical interests.

Marching band was the main focus of my high school music career and though I was in pretty good physical shape afterwards, I hadn't really progressed musically. I decided to dual enroll in the last two years of high school at the local community college but I continued playing in the band at my high school because I did not really have any other musical outlet that I could

rely on. I wasn't really involved in the music program at the community college where I studied and I still had friends in the high school band program. I did not hate my marching band experience, there's nothing quite like standing on a field in a professional athletic stadium and hearing the last note of your 11 minute marching band show reverberate off the walls as the crowd starts to cheer and sweat drips down your face, but in hindsight I recognize that it was a very toxic environment that I hope to avoid in my own future classroom.

The University of Florida is located in my home town of Gainesville and is a very large university that attracts a diverse group of academics and students from around the globe. Students attending the university make up the majority of Gainesville's population which made my hometown much more diverse than other parts of Florida. Growing up in a liberal college town provided a very diverse atmosphere in both my educational and personal environments that would not have been present if I lived in a more rural area of Florida. If I had grown up in a more rural area, the schools I would have attended would have been less diverse and would not have had the same funding to provide the experience I received in a more densely populated suburban area. After high school, I moved to the panhandle to attend college in a more rural area of Florida.

I attended the University of West Florida in Pensacola and graduated with my Bachelors of Music in Music Performance and my Bachelors of Arts in Telecommunications and Film in 2017. My experience in the music department at UWF was a mix of positive and extremely negative experiences. It felt like the department was mainly focused on the students who played piano, a string instrument, or the classical vocalists, and the rest of us were just there. All of the master classes presented during my undergraduate study were intended for students that played traditional western classical instruments and it was obvious who the favorite students were

among the professors in the department. I observed this favoritism causing a lot of anxiety and stress among my colleagues that were not the favorites and received less attention. This was my second example of a toxic environment, this one based on hierarchy and exclusionary favoritism, that I want to avoid in my future classroom. I want to make my students feel seen, accepted, and excited to participate, not stressed, anxious, and in constant competition with one another. This experience also provided me with my first real introduction to playing jazz in a small and large group setting and would eventually influence my decision to continue my formal music education through a Master's Degree in Jazz Studies.

I moved to Portland, Oregon in 2017 to pursue my Masters of Music in Jazz Studies at Portland State University. I knew that if I wanted to progress musically I would need to move to a city where there was a more active music scene than the two small towns I had previously lived in and a standard of playing ability of the local musicians that was at a more professional level. I had a lot of friends in Pensacola, and I would have found places to play but I knew that I was only going to go so far if I stayed there and I wanted more.

I struggled in the first year of my program at PSU because I was entering an experienced jazz community from the background of a classical musician and was not at the level I needed to be to keep up with my new peers. I had also just moved across the country and was having trouble finding the inclusive community that accepted me and that I wanted to be a part of. I then spent the next five years sitting in my living room transcribing, practicing, and preparing to finish my program. I uprooted my entire life and left everything I knew to pursue a more professional musical experience. Music is one of the few things that has been consistent throughout my life that helps me feel and express complicated emotions. This determination to develop and feel accepted in a more advanced music community kept me going during the five

years I spent practicing alone in my living room. I also told myself that if I kept working hard and I kept my musical goals at the front of my mind then nothing could stop me. This kind of determination, discipline, and drive to achieve are all qualities that I can impart to the students in my classroom to foster an inclusive and welcoming creative community. Through inclusiveness and individual support, I can gain the trust of my students so they will allow me to help them explore their own musical curiosity and develop transferable life skills like self-discipline and organization.

I returned to PSU in 2022 and finally felt like I belonged there. The second year of my program at PSU went much better but I still experienced a similar form of exclusion that I felt in the music department at UWF. Though I felt more accepted by my peers and the general music community around me, the professor that ran the majority of my classes at PSU did not seem interested in speaking to me. He was blatantly rude to me and other students on multiple occasions and he exhibited obvious favoritism to the more advanced musicians. His actions created another toxic musical environment that made the majority of his students feel like they would never be good enough. This experience provided me with another opportunity to encounter the kind of exclusionary music community based on hierarchy and competition that I wanted to avoid in my future classroom.

Guiding Pedagogical Theory

I want to explore the idea that creating an inclusive classroom built on joy will create intrinsic motivation in my students. Music, at its organic roots, is the expression of an individual or group of people cooperating to create a shared experience. I want to create a welcoming classroom environment that my students are excited to enter and participate in. Not every student that finds themselves in one of my classes is going to be interested in music when they first start

but they will be more inclined to listen to what I have to say if they like me as a teacher and enjoy being in my class. I will not be able to reach every student but for those I can reach, I want to be the subject that they look forward to coming to everyday. I want to foster community within my classroom in the same way that my middle school band director did, by leading by example based on my own personal love for music.

My past negative academic experiences and the exclusionary environments that I have encountered and observed have informed my choice to explore this educational idea because I have watched the passion for music die in many of my peers as they have encountered negative academic experiences. I hope to create intrinsic motivation in my students through the power of joy and the building of self confidence in my inclusive classroom. I theorize that if I can create an inclusive classroom that my students feel comfortable, supported, and excited to be in, they will be more interested in what I have to teach them. If I can capture their attention and pique their interest then I will have a better chance of relating to students that were previously uninterested in music. If I can create an inclusive community in my music classroom that students want to be a part of, then they will be motivated to work harder to meet the standards of that community. This idea is based on the same reason that motivated me to spend five years practicing in my living room before I returned to finish studies at PSU. If I can create a feeling of acceptance and positive achievement through inclusive classroom practices then students will motivate themselves to practice and musically progress.

I want to apply elements of Gholdy Muhammad's Histories, Identities, Literacies, and Liberation (HILL) Method and the application of joy in my music classroom. Muhammad (2023) describes joy as:

the practice of loving self and humanity;... recognizing truth, beauty, aesthetics, art, and wonder;... advancing happiness by elevating beauty in humanity, as well as truthful narratives and representations of diverse people of the world (including the narratives and representations of our students) (P. 77)

Joy, unity, and shared positive experiences are more important now than ever as our current American society starts to take an authoritarian turn. It is our duty as educators to provide an educational space that our students, especially those being targeted by current immigration policies, feel safe and welcome in our classrooms. As teachers, it is our duty to both educate our students and create safe spaces where students feel they belong. It is important for teachers to create positive inclusive communities because “our children's early experiences...shape what they imagine to be possible for people who look like them, live where they live, or come from where they came from” (Thomas, 2016). Positive representation and opportunities for joy, or lack thereof, can have a drastic effect on the motivation and self-efficacy of students.

I will consider the following questions from Gholdy Muhammad as the guiding tenets for my pedagogical practice of joy:

1. How does my curriculum and instruction enable, amplify, and spread joy?
2. What types of joy could I bring into the curriculum and instruction?
3. How does my curriculum and instruction elevate beauty within humanity?
4. How will I write learning objectives that will help my students pursue and embrace joy?
5. How will I know if my students are experiencing the learning practices of joy?

(Muhammad, 2023, P. 70)

My own educational history informs my decision to choose this area of study because I have witnessed the different levels of student success that result from toxic, overly competitive, and exclusionary programs compared to those that celebrate and foster joy and musical expression. A lot of my negative academic experiences in music have resulted from environments where joy and the individual identities of students were not considered important. My educational journey has taught me the importance of a supportive, inclusive community and the power of joy and positive shared experiences. This theory is appropriate to guide my study because the organic act of creating music is rooted in joy and self expression. Students feel a sense of accomplishment when they are able to successfully complete an action and music provides them with a daily activity to feel this sense of success.

The HILL model was developed and presented by Gholdy Muhammad in her 2020 book *Cultivating Genius* and she founded HILL Pedagogies in 2018 to “transform education by advancing students’ Histories, Identities, Literacies, and Liberation (HILL) through culturally and historically responsive professional learning and consultation” (HILL Pedagogies, 2025). This pedagogical model presents five pursuits for culturally and historically responsible education: identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy. I will focus mainly on the pursuit of joy and the development of musical skills through the “learning of multiple and diverse learning standards, competencies, and proficiencies. These are the actionable things we want students to be able to do” (HILL Pedagogies, 2025). Joy is one of the outcomes that result from the practice of an inclusive pedagogy. Joy can take many forms but it results most strongly when students are able to observe an actionable thing that they are able to do themselves that they previously were unable to do.

My educational history has informed my decision to choose this pedagogical model because I encountered multiple negative examples of toxic environments that extinguished the curiosity and interest of many of my musical colleagues. Academic music tends to lack a certain amount of joy for the simple reason that it has to be graded and measured, and joy does not really fit into a rubric. Traditional American education is very focused on the values it wants to impose on its students to assimilate them into the broader American society instead of the celebration of individual student identities and the tools to pursue current and future happiness. Through inclusive pedagogy, I want to break the mold of traditional music academia and provide a music program based on the idea of community and joy.

This theory that creating an inclusive classroom built on joy to inspire intrinsic motivation in students is appropriate to guide my study because it addresses many of the deficits that I faced and observed in my academic past.

Connection to InTasc Standards

The InTASC standards are 10 skills and abilities that all teachers should be familiar with and have the ability to do. These standards were set by the Council of Chief State School Officials (CCSSO) in the documents *InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards: A Resource for State Dialogue (2011)* and *InTASC Learning Progressions for Teachers 1.0: A Resource for Ongoing Teacher Development (2013)*.

My educational goal and the pedagogical theory I have chosen to guide this study align with the following InTASC standards: #2: Learning Differences, Standard #3: Learning Environments, Standard #5: Application of Content.

Standard #2: Learning Differences states that “the teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning

environments that enable each learner to meet high standards” (CCSSO, 2013, P.17). I chose this standard because it describes the kind of inclusive classroom I want to establish based on the individual needs of the students.

Standard #3: Learning Environments states that “the teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self motivation” (CCSSO, 2013, P.21). I chose this standard because it describes the collaborative interaction that I want to take place between my students in my classroom. It also describes the collaborative action I want to take to connect my music program with other programmatic things happening at the school.

Standard #5: Application of Content states that “the teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues” (CCSSO, 2013, P.27). I chose this standard because, like standard 2, it describes how I want to use inclusive practices to reach the learners with varying personal and cultural perspectives. This standard also relates to the previously discussed idea that teachers are responsible for creating welcoming environments for their students to feel accepted in.

The HILL model and the focus on joy that I have chosen to guide my study aligns with these standards. This model intentionally lays out a framework for the use of historically and culturally responsive education to produce an inclusive learning environment that celebrates the identity and strengths of each individual student. The focus on joy specifically supports standards #3 and #5 because their goal is to create the intrinsic motivation in students to learn and participate in critical thinking, creative problem solving, and creative expression in an individual and group setting.

Summary

I am originally from Gainesville, Florida, and I moved to Portland, OR in 2017 to pursue an MM in Jazz Studies and to live in a place where there was a more active music scene. Music has been my favorite school subject since I started playing saxophone in the 5th grade. I participated in academic music through middle and high school and made it my main focus throughout my college career. I have met a lot of really great people and had a lot of positive experiences through music, but I have also experienced and witnessed how toxic competitiveness and unnecessary hierarchies can form exclusionary elements that turn people away from their musical passions and aspirations. I want to create a welcoming classroom environment that celebrates joy and the individual identities of my students. Students tend to check out mentally when they are in a class that they do not enjoy. I want to create the classroom that my students like coming to everyday and look forward to participating in.

I plan to incorporate elements from Gholdy Muhammad's HILL method discussed in her book *Cultivating Genius* (2020). I chose these pedagogical ideas to guide my study because I believe that an inclusive classroom built on joy will create intrinsic motivation for my students to succeed. Incorporating elements from this pedagogical model will help me address the deficits I experienced in my own educational journey. More musicians is always a nice side effect of music education but I want to help give my students transferable skills like self-discipline, determination, and ability to create the intrinsic motivation that they will need to be successful in whatever future pursuit they end up choosing. These models and guidelines will help me create a more inclusive classroom that celebrates joy, positive shared experiences, and the individual strengths of my students.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Research and Scholarship

With this study I explore the theory that creating an inclusive classroom built on joy will create a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation in my students. I am hoping to learn different ways to apply culturally relevant teaching methods to my future pedagogical approach so I can better understand and relate to the students in my classroom. If I can have a better understanding of who the students in my room are, then I will be better equipped to serve them. I reviewed literature on pedagogical approaches centered on cultural relevance, psychology studies on teacher-student motivation (and the effects of the former on the latter), theories on how to support student autonomy, and ideas about how to access student joy and the many forms that that joy takes in the band room. I chose the articles on culturally relevant pedagogical approaches to discover different ways I could try to create and embrace joy in my classroom. To be able to create joy for my students I will first have to understand who those students are. I chose this study because it provides empirical evidence to support my ideas about sources of student motivation and the types of pedagogical actions that support positive teacher-student interactions. I also chose articles and books relating to student joy to have a better understanding of what joy means to different cultures and the many forms that it can take.

I located most of my articles through the WOU Hamersly library website using the following search terms: joy, student joy, motivation, student motivation, intrinsic motivation, cultural relevancy, inclusivity. I also located a few of my articles on the JSTOR database that I accessed through the WOU library page. I chose these search terms because I felt that they were the key words that described the topic I was studying. A few of my articles I took from the WOU MAT course readings because I felt that they provided excellent reference sources and they were completely applicable to my study.

Adjapong, E., Emdin, C. (2015) explored the benefits of using two elements of hip-hop as a pedagogical practice in classrooms with predominantly students of color. The methods of call & response and co-teaching were the selected elements of Hip-hop to be used in this study. To collect data the researchers conducted student focus groups, recorded lessons, and they had students fill out questionnaires. This article was written through the lens of Culturally Relevant Education (CRE) and Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE). This study took place in a sixth grade science classroom in a Title 1 school with mostly students of color who come from communities of extreme poverty in the Northeastern United States. Data was collected throughout the school year by the researchers as they instructed the course. This research showed positive reception from students to the methods of the study. The researchers used rhythmic call and response activities to help students learn definitions and memorize scientific content. The researchers chose two students from the class to be their co-teachers as a way to engage and empower their students to take agency in their own education. This method of co-teaching “supported students’ agency and voice in the science classroom...[so that co-teachers] were able to interact with students differently than the teacher to foster students’ understanding of the content” (Adjapong, Emdin, 2015, p.73). These student co-teachers were able to relate and translate some of the information to the other students in a way that the adult teachers were unable to do. The results of the questionnaire showed that students were overwhelmingly receptive to the Hip-hop pedagogies being present in their classroom. This reception was present because the students felt that Hip-hop was a part of their personal culture and that learning science, something they may not have been previously interested in, was made more interesting and achievable when framed through the lens of something they already had an interest in. This article is applicable to my current study because it describes two very simple ways to apply CRE to positively influence

students who may have previously been out of reach. Providing a connection between what students are learning to their lives outside of school is one very strong way to create intrinsic motivation in students. The better I know my students, the better I can connect with them and ignite their inner joy. This article's strength was in the approachable way that the author presented their findings but it could have been strengthened by a couple of missing details. This research could be continued to expand the applications of student co-teachers and call and response exercises.

Ahn, I., Chui, M., & Patrick, H. (2021) tested the complete model of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a way to prove how the motivation of teachers affects the motivation of students. This study was conducted in three elementary schools in South Korea. Questions from the following sources were used in this study: The 20-item Teacher Self-Determination (Taylor & Ntoumains, 2007), Teacher as Social Context Questionnaire (TASCQ) (Belmont et al. 1992), Korean Basic Psychological Needs Scale (K-BPNS) (Lee & Kim, 2008), and the Korean Academic Self- Regulation Questionnaire (K-SQR-A) (Kim, 2002). This article is written through the lens of educational psychologists who are testing the validity of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). There were 697 students participating from 35 different classrooms in this Korean study. Data was collected over the course of the day from anonymously answered student and teacher questionnaires that they took at separate times..This research “showed evidence supporting: 1) a positive link between teacher and student autonomous motivation, and, 2) its mediation by student-perceived need-supportive practices and student autonomy and competence) (Ahn et al., 2021, p.1). They found that students react more positively to autonomous motivation over controlled motivation and that structured opportunities for student choice and input helped students feel more engaged in their own learning. They also

found that students are more personally motivated to engage in a subject when their teacher includes their own interest and personal motivation in their teaching. This article is applicable to my current study because it takes a more in depth look at the importance of student autonomy in the classroom as it relates to the SDT. Having a better understanding of the multiple elements that affect intrinsic motivation in students, like a sense of personal autonomy and the relationship between teacher actions and student interpretation of those actions, I can plan activities and lessons that will help me develop more positive relationships with my students. If I can plan activities that create better relationships with my students, then I will be able to access their sense of joy and inspire their own intrinsic motivation to refine their musical craft. This article provided a number of very helpful reflections and ideas about student motivation.

Brown, Julie K. (2008) examines the importance of student-centered instruction and the value of involving students in the instruction and leading of the musical ensemble. Music education is both an individual and group activity which functions best if the individual is the focus of the activity. “In student-centered classrooms, students are involved in creating strategies that teachers can use... often no one knows better how students learn than the students themselves” (Brown ,2008, p.31). Brown introduces the methods of Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) and Arts Propel as two examples of student centered instruction. This research was conducted through the lens of Culturally Relevant Education (CRE) and the Self-Determination theory (SDT). Data that influenced the writing of this article was gathered over time through the teaching experiences of a seasoned music educator. Students that are challenged to take agency in their own education will feel more compelled to meet the high but reachable expectations set for them. “By keeping students at the center of one’s classroom, a teacher can encourage and inspire students to seek out knowledge and to strive for

understanding at a deeper level” (Brown, 2008, P.35). Students are given more autonomy in the classroom through the empowerment of peer co-teachers and set expectations that everyone in a section is responsible for the comprehension and instruction of every member in their section. This creates a sense of community within the band and it allows for advanced students to think more deeply about their musical understanding of a particular piece of music through the act of teaching. This article was helpful in my current study because it provided multiple viable suggestions to offer opportunities for increased student autonomy and sense of community within my music program. Both of these outcomes are desirable in my quest to harness student joy to create intrinsic motivation in my classroom. The strengths of the article were the clearly stated reasons of why student centered instruction is important and how it can create “self-sufficient, creative thinkers and people who appreciate and value the subject being taught” (Brown, 2008, P.33).

Campbell, Patricia S. (2022) describes the power of music to create joy and its ability to help students regulate their own emotions. Campbell explores the processes of “listening, singing, playing and dancing to music” (Campbell, 2022, P.14) that teachers of all subjects can employ in their classrooms to access and engage student joy. Campbell specifically talks about the use of recorded music as a transitional tool to help students acclimate into the classroom setting, move between different activities during the lesson, and get ready to transition to their next class. She also discusses the use of music to help regulate student emotions and create a stronger sense of empathy between students. This article is written through the lens of Culturally Relevant Education (CRE) by a college music professor of ethnomusicology and music education. Data that influenced the writing of this article was gathered over time through the teaching experiences of a seasoned educator. Campbell concludes that “we share music as a

characteristic of our humanity” (Campbell, 2022, P.17) and teachers of all subjects can utilize music in their classrooms to help positively motivate their students. Campbell states that music can be used to relieve stress and form positive student-teacher relationships. This article is applicable to my current study because it describes the many entry points to joy that music can provide to students throughout their school day. Campbell gives a plethora of examples to describe the multiple uses of music for all teachers across all subjects. I specifically liked her examples of how to utilize music to help regulate student emotions. She writes, “focus their attention, think creatively and expressively, [and] retain information” (Campbell, 2022, P.14). The purpose of this article is to persuade non-music teachers of the importance of utilizing music in the classrooms and Campbell does an excellent job of that. I agree that more non-music teachers should try to utilize music in their classrooms, especially those teaching language arts, history, and social studies classes. Music is a part of every culture and it generally reflects the people and society that produced it. Utilizing different practices and forms of music in a classroom is a great way to relate and form positive relationships with students.

Duncan-Andrade, Jeffrey M.R.(2009) examines the destructive power of false hope and the importance of critical hope in the lives of students of color. Duncan-Andrade defines the critical hope that he is emphasizing as something that “rejects the despair and hopelessness and the false hope of [false promises]” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, P.185). This critical hope is composed of three elements: 1) material hope, 2) socratic Hope, and 3) audacious hope. This article is written through the lens of Culturally Relevant Education (CRE). This is not a study but a reflective essay by an associate professor of Latina/o Studies and Race and Resistance inspired by the core principle of the Obama campaign: hope. Duncan- Andrade concludes that false hopes like hokey hope, mythical hope, and deferred hope only give false and empty promises

that leave students in the same place as they started. These kinds of hope don't take into account the different starting points and level of access that are unique to each individual student.

Students, especially those from lower income backgrounds with a less stable homelife, require real hope and support to make any kind of impactful change in their lives. This article is applicable to my current study because it defines the different types of hope that can be damaging and the types that hope that can be positively impactful in the lives of our students.

Hope is an integral part of joy. If our students are hopeless and see no connection or benefit to the information we are teaching them then they won't see any point in learning the material. The statements of false hope are impactful because they describe a lot of commonly held statements that are normally fed to young students but do not take into account the varying levels of equity that our students are faced with.

Gurgel, Ruth (2015) outlines five strategies for building positive student-teacher relationships in a diverse classroom. The strategies are as follows: 1) Ensuring that students experience continual musical achievement 2) Taking responsibility for initiating positive relationships 3) Becoming culturally competent by viewing personal experiences and understandings as culturally situated instead of "the norm" 4) Caring for students with humility and caution by working to understand students' culturally situated understandings and values 5) Constructing an environment where students are seen as equal contributors with teachers to the learning. These theories were analyzed through the lens of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Sociopolitical Consciousness in Music Education. Data that influenced the writing of this article was gathered over time through the teaching experiences of a seasoned educator and the reading of a number of scholarly articles and publications. Gurgel theorizes that by following the five positive relationship-building

strategies explained in her writing that teachers will be able to connect “to students through a willingness to learn, change and to be surprised...and is on a positive path to effective music teaching” (Gurgel, 2015, P.83-84). Gurgel concludes that, as teachers, we have to be open to understanding and connecting with our students and their families to be able to create positive relationships in the classroom. This article is very helpful to my current study because creating strong student-teacher relationships within the classroom is a foundational part of being able to access the student joy and intrinsic motivation I am seeking. Students have to feel like they are welcome and that they belong in the community of the band room for them to truly be able to access the organic joy that comes from music. I really like the explanation of the fifth strategy that describes teachers as “focused more on giving students the ‘power to do’ rather than maintaining the ‘power over’ them” (Gurgel, 2015, P. 82). Giving students a strong sense of personal confidence and a personal stake in their education through increased autonomy is one of the methods I hope to apply from this article. This article was very specific on how to implement each described strategy and gave very detailed examples in each section.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria (1995) seeks to describe Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and its importance in serving students from diverse backgrounds who have been historically underserved and excluded. It's important to impart transferable life skills to our students through consistent as well as the information in our content area. “Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria... a) students must experience academic success, b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, P.160). Engaging students with culturally relevant material, teaching them how to form their own thoughts and think instead of blindly obeying, and providing reachable goals that can provide

measurable success to students are all methods described in this article. Ladson-Billings also describes ways to connect with the families and broader communities that students belong to to provide additional interaction, support, and acceptance from those communities. This article is written through the lens of Culturally Relevant Education (CRE). Data that influenced this study was collected over a period of six years while engaging with multiple teachers of African American students. Culture is a broad term that can describe more than the ethnic background of students. Student culture can include things like the type of music they listen to, the memes they look at, and the colloquialisms that they use. “Culturally relevant teachers use their students’ culture as a vehicle for learning” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, P.16). This article concludes that the best way to reach students is not to force them to come to you but to shape your pedagogical approach around them. Students will be more engaged in an activity if it involves something that they are already interested in doing. Ladson-Billings provided an excellent example of this while discussing how an English teacher got some of her students interested in her love of poetry by making the connection between poetry and rap music and allowing her students to complete assignments in a rap format. This article is applicable to my current study because cultural relevancy plays a huge factor in a teacher's ability to positively connect and relate to their students. The better I know my students and understand the communities they come from, the better chance I have at forming impactful positive relationships with them. If I can successfully form strong relationships with my students then I will be more successful in accessing their joy and inspiring their own intrinsic motivation in music.

Ladson-Billings, Gloria (2021) theorizes different culturally relevant approaches to improve education after the COVID-19 pandemic. Ladson Billings theorizes changes in how we utilize technology, what curriculum we teach, the pedagogical approaches of our teachers,

culturally appropriate and receptive assessment, and parent/community interaction to reset our education system. This article was written through the lens of Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) and the Critical Race Theory (CRT). Data that influenced the writing of this article was collected over a lifetime by a seasoned educator, activist, and author. Ladson- Billings concludes that a widespread change in curriculum, use and access to technology, pedagogy, and assessment is necessary to change negative narratives and stereotypes about people of color that have been established through systemic actions over the last two hundred years. What we teach needs to reflect and relate to the cultural experience of the diverse students in our classes. Schools should be places of intellectual exploration and expression, not places where we blindly train children to follow nationalistic and oppressive ideologies that support a false narrative of American righteousness. To change the societal narrative of Black people that has been established in American culture through racist legislation and systemic actions, we have to change the perspective on how we represent and include contributions from the Black community to the betterment of American society in our curriculum in a non-tourist way. This article is applicable to my current study because it is a recent examination of the inequity that exists in our current education system. To be able to identify and implement culturally relevant teaching practices we must first understand the communities that our students come from. If I want to create joy and a sense of belonging in my classroom, I need to have a better understanding of who is in my classroom. This article's strength lies in the clarity in which the author makes their point.

Muhammad, Gholdy (2020) seeks to establish a foundation and examples for Historically Responsive Literacy (HRL) to be used in academic classrooms. Muhammad focuses on teaching and learning through the emphasis of identity development, skills development, intellect development, and development of criticality through the use of historically responsive texts. This

book was written through the lens of Culturally Responsive Education (CRE), Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Historically Responsive Literacy (HRL). Data that influenced this writing was collected through first hand experiences of the author and her work with other educators. Muhammad states the importance of students' individual identities and the role that appropriate representation plays in their learning curriculum. She also states the importance of the cultivation of literacy skills, the ability for students to think critically and to question societal norms, and the toll that deficit speech and high stakes standardized testing can have on students. This book is applicable to my current study because it gives an in depth description of how to support students, particularly those of color, with historically responsive writing that provides appropriate representation. There is a chapter dedicated to how to pick historically responsive texts and another entire chapter dedicated to ideas about how to apply those selected texts. I will focus particularly on the section about self identity because I believe that if I can help my students establish a strong sense of self confidence and individual identity then I can help them access their joy and find their own intrinsic motivation.

Muhammad, Gholdy (2023) seeks to provide a historical background and present a practical guide to centering joy in K-12 education. This book was written using the Histories, Identities, Literacies, and Liberation (HILL) Model of historically and culturally responsive teaching practices. This book centers the focus on joy as an foundationally important element to culturally and historically responsive education. This book was written through the lens of critical race theory and the HILL model of education. Data that influenced this writing was collected through first hand experiences of the author, her work with other educators, and the establishment of HILL pedagogies. This writing gives several descriptive definitions for joy and how it can be manifested through “elevating beauty in humanity” and providing appropriate

representation for students to “see themselves manifested in our curriculum” (Muhammad, 2023, P.70). Muhammad describes joy as an evolving individual pursuit instead of a stagnant standard from a single perspective. She also argues that the 5 pursuits of identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy are integral parts of the future of culturally responsive education. This concept is a continuation of the 4 layered HRL framework with the addition of joy discussed in *Cultivating Genius (2020)*. This book is applicable to my current study because it focuses on joy as an integral part of the human and academic experience. It provides an in depth history of joy as a cultural practice and how misinformation and the erasure of history does nothing to serve students or our collective future. It provides a very clear model, HILL, to serve as a foundational element in pedagogical planning and dedicates a whole chapter to practical and creative methods to apply that model.

Smith, Corinne (2025) seeks to describe all of the different ways that joy can be embodied in the musical process no matter the academic setting. “Being an effective teacher is sharing... joy with students while also creating an environment that allows students to freely share their own thoughts and feelings... 1) joy is infectious and 2) sharing joy is built on trust” (Smith, 2025, P.6). Smith uses humor as an essential tool to create student joy and positive engagement in the classroom. Smith also emphasizes the importance of positive shared experience as a way to build on student joy and self confidence. This analysis was done under the lens of a music educator wanting to spread joy and inclusion in the classroom. Data that influenced the writing of this article was gathered over time through the teaching experiences of a seasoned educator. Smith concludes that “joy is not an emotion but also a decision we make even in the face of trials” (Smith, 2025, P.8). Smith gives a clear message about the many different forms that joy can take in the music classroom and therefore provides multiple entry

points to applying happiness to a lesson plan. Overall, joy is described as a shared experience that makes students more comfortable in a specific setting, inspires them to continue their pursuit of musical expression, and brightens their day when they are feeling sad. This article is applicable to my current study because it defines the multifaceted face of joy and how it can be present in the music classroom. Smith gives many examples of the different types of joy and proves that happiness comes in many forms of shared experience. “I am committed to helping their musical growth and helping them shine, even when they don’t believe they can” (Smith, 2025, P. 6). Sometimes students need someone to believe in them before they can believe in themselves. It's not my goal to create more professional musicians but to create more self confident individuals that have the desire and the tools to succeed. I like the idea of the music classroom as a family and a broader community within the school. It describes the feeling of belonging and the reason why many band students tend to gravitate towards the band room in their free time while at school.

Zou, H., Yao, J., Zhang, Y., & Huang, X. (2024) studied the effect of teacher attitude and motivation style on the intrinsic motivation of their students. This study took place in China and questions from the following sources were translated, adjusted, and used in this study: “Teachers’ Motivation for Teaching Scale” by Zhong et al.(1999), “Learning Self-Regulation Questionnaire” by Ryan & Connell (1989), “Teacher Behavior Assessment Scale” Assor et al.(2002), and “Teacher-Student Relationship Questionnaire” by Yao & Tang(2005). This analysis was done through the lens of a group of psychologists applying the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This study was conducted at 3 middle schools in China. 44 teachers and 2461 students were a part of this study. Data was collected through anonymous teacher and student surveys. “Based on SDT, we hypothesized that teachers’ motivating styles and teacher-student

relationships may play an important role in the contagion of teachers' and students' motivation" (Zou et al., 2024, P.274). This hypothesis was proven correct by this study and found that students responded more positively to an "autonomy-supporting motivating style... as opposed to [a] controlling motivating style" (Zou et al., 2024, P. 282). The intrinsic motivation and support style used by teachers had a direct and impactful effect on the way that their students perceived their lessons. This article is applicable to my study because it provides mathematical results from a large test group that prove that the motivation of the teacher and the style of motivation the teacher applies directly impacts the motivation of the student. The discussion section of this article provides a number of great ideas about ways to establish positive teacher-student relationships and how to provide increased student autonomy in the classroom. This article provides some incredibly strong evidence to support SDT and the hypothesis stated above.

The common thread through all of this research is that each student is an individual person with individual needs that are informed from a variety of cultures and life experiences. Equity in education means something different for every student and our pedagogical approach has to reflect and relate to all students in the room. The teacher is responsible for setting the expectations and the environment of the band room but they also have to create opportunities for individual student autonomy and planned student leadership. Joy exists in every student and can manifest in a variety of ways. Appropriate cultural representation and the non-touristic inclusion and celebration of the cultures existing in our classroom is imperative to providing an accepting environment where students feel that they belong.

Chapter 3: Methods

Action research is the process of gathering data to answer a question or support an overarching theory. According to Sagor (2000) action research “is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the ‘actor’ in improving and/or refining his or her actions” (p.3). Action research can be utilized by teachers to study pedagogical challenges they face in their classrooms and provide supported evidence for new approaches to these challenges. This research is normally conducted for the benefit of the researcher to assist in the improvement of a specific action they are pursuing. Action research can be applied to many different content areas and is a suitable tool to be utilized by a variety of studies.

Action research follows the following steps, according to Sagor:

1. Selecting a focus
2. Clarifying theories
3. Identifying research questions
4. Collecting data
5. Analyzing data
6. Reporting results
7. Taking informed action

Action research was the proper method for my study because it allowed me to collect quantifiable data that I can use as evidence to guide my future lesson planning. This action research process provided the necessary structure to organize and analyze the data I collected to answer my research questions.

The following questions guided my study: 1) How can I create an inclusive classroom built on joy to inspire students to create their own intrinsic motivation? 2) How can I utilize the Self Determination theory (SDT), Culturally Relevant Education (CRE), Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE), and the Histories, Identities, Literacies, and Liberation (HILL) model to produce joy and an inclusive classroom that my students feel comfortable and accepted in?

Participants and Setting

I collected my data from the 7th grade intermediate band at my clinical site. I have been working with this group of students since the beginning of my placement in this program in September of 2025. I was placed in a middle school located in the city of Beaverton, Oregon for my clinical site. This middle school has 696 students currently enrolled. Students with disabilities make up 14% of the student population, 40% of the student population is experiencing poverty, there are 38 languages spoken among the student population, and 43% of the student population are Ever English Learners (ELLs). The majority of the students, 73%, are students of color and the majority of the teaching staff, 84%, are White. This school has a very large Hispanic/Latino population that accounts for 45% of the student population. This school is located in a suburban area about 30 minutes outside of Portland.

There are 46 students in the band class that this research was conducted in. 13 of the students are enrolled in the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program, eight are enrolled in the Dual Language (DL) program, six students are receiving English Language Learner (ELL) services, and three are in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. Two students have IEP/ 504 plans and both students are also receiving Special Education services. There are 30 male students and 16 female students. 26 students identify as BIPOC and 20 identify as White. The majority of students, 38, speak English with their families at home but there are also

six students who speak Spanish, one who speaks Chinese, and one family who speaks Telugu at home.

All of these students have been a part of the band program for at least one year and have a foundational understanding of music literacy and the technical mechanics needed to play their chosen instrument. Most students are able to identify and define all of the notes on the staff as well as those on ledger lines below and above the staff. Most students are also able to identify and define basic musical symbols used to indicate articulations and dynamic contrast. They are also able to produce a pleasant sounding tone on their instrument of choice. There are also a number of students who are members of the school choir, jazz band, and mariachi groups.

As a teacher, two of my strengths are my ability to create an inclusive and welcoming classroom for my students and I have a strong grasp on the subject content that I am instructing . Over the months I've worked with these students, I've developed a solid working rapport with them through the use of personal stories related to our class discussions, the inclusion of humor in the classroom everyday, and giving extra time for student instruction outside of the class period, I have built a strong rapport with this group that has become noticeable in how they are positively receiving my instructions. As a result of this positive rapport, I now have a much better grasp on their musical abilities and limitations as a group which helps to inform the decisions I make in my lesson planning process. Most of the time I can engage and guide the energy of this group into productive work but there are times that I have a hard time keeping the attention of the entire group for the entire class period, especially on Friday's. I can also improve on my approach to how I balance the overall band sound and describe musicality in a more developmentally approachable way.

Data Collection & Analysis

I collected a variety of data for this project including audio teaching reflection journals, exit tickets, an assessment quiz, self assessment rubrics, and informal observations of student engagement. My CT doesn't write lesson plans but we did discuss the overall unit goal for this lesson and how I could shape my lesson plan to fulfill these unit requirements. I made informal observations of student engagement during our class rehearsals and recorded brief audio journal entries after each lesson in this unit to reflect on the methods I employed during the lesson and the outcome that these methods had for the class. I also used two different exit tickets and a quiz to collect formative and summative data during the teaching of this unit. Lastly, I revised this lesson and the methods employed during its instruction based on feedback from both my CT and field supervisor. I followed this idea of using multiple sources of information to collect data on my area of study based on the "Collecting Data" section in Sagor (2000).

I followed the traditional qualitative analysis procedure by organizing my collected data into coded sections after the use of open coding to improve the ease of my thematic analysis. Open coding is the process of breaking raw data into sections that can be grouped by thematic similarities. I used the process of open coding to read and review my data once it was collected and to develop codes to organize this data once I familiarized myself with it. The codes I developed were based on the similarities between the data I was analyzing and it helped me figure out how to organize my collected data into sections that presented clear themes for later analysis. I arrived at my codes after analyzing data gathered through my audio reflection journals, exit tickets, and quiz. This process also helped me figure out what part of the lesson plan needed to be revised when teaching this unit again in the future. I triangulated various data from the observations and assessments I collected information from by pre-planning the use of

specifically worded questions in the written assessments and intentional observations into each assessment activity with the pre-determined plan to use this information to gather specific data from the students. This pre-determined intention helped me to keep the themes of my analysis conceptually congruent and aligned with my overall goal. I asked my field supervisor to help me review my data analysis and improve the deductions made from this information.

Researcher Positionality

I am a 30 year old heterosexual White male from a middle class family in Florida that only speaks English. My mother's side of the family is of Italian descent and my father's family are a part of the Ashkenazi Jewish population. Both sides of my family arrived in America at the beginning of the 20th century and assimilated into the American White population within a generation and benefitted from systemic policies of White supremacy. Both sides of my family immigrated through Ellis Island in New York before eventually migrating to Florida. I have benefitted from multiple systemic institutional privileges based on the racial history of the state where I was born and the country I have lived in my entire life. I actively work to identify and counteract the personal biases that I hold through individual reading and personal reflection to be able to provide a more culturally relevant and inclusive space within my classroom. I strive to continually educate myself on ways I can be more racially competent and accepting in both my personal and professional lives.

I started playing the saxophone when I was 10 years old and I participated in both my middle and high school band programs before studying music as both an undergraduate and graduate student at multiple universities. I have participated in numerous band camps, attended multiple national music conferences like the one hosted by the Jazz Education Network (JEN), and I have experience performing in various genres of music. I am currently a member of the

touring band No Soap, Radio. I have taught private lessons for over six years and I have spent the last two years establishing and running a youth music non-profit called Swingin' Sounds in the city of Portland, OR that provides expanded access to the existing music community of the city to youth musicians. My experiences with this nonprofit organization have reinforced my belief in the importance of an inclusive musical community and the integral role that it holds in the development of young musicians. This organization serves as a strong example of the kind of community that I want to establish within my classroom.

My personal education journey has brought me through a lot of experiences that were devoid of joy and that encouraged competition and division among its participants. I have spent a lot of time in non-inclusive music programs that create division instead of community. My high school experience was focused solely on winning competitions and both of the college music departments I studied in created unhealthy competition and tension between some of their students. These experiences informed my current study by providing multiple examples of different negative musical environments that I wish to avoid in my classroom.

Chapter 4: Findings

The overarching purpose of this study was to test the theory that creating an inclusive classroom built on joy would inspire my music students to create their own intrinsic motivation. I wanted to test and determine what types of joy I could bring into the curriculum and the instruction through the utilization of humor, consistent positive emphasis and encouragement, and by establishing expectations for positive student achievement. The following data and analysis in this chapter are organized into three different themes. Each of the themes contains data collected during the study that provides supporting evidence to the theme and the overarching purpose to this study.

The three major themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected for this action research project. Those themes were: 1) Humor was a teaching technique that increased student engagement, 2) Increase in student retention from consistent emphasis and encouragement, and 3) Expectations for classroom behavior and student practice routines needed to be established. I used evidence from my research to discuss how each theme from my data analysis related to or differed from the theory that creating an inclusive classroom built on joy would create a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation in my students.. I also used evidence gathered from three separate written assessments, two different self assessment rubrics, and recorded audio reflections that were made after each lesson.

Two of the written assessments were in the form of two exit tickets given at the end of the first two lessons of this unit (see Figure 4). These exit tickets were meant to both test the students' retention of the knowledge that we covered that day in class and to survey their level of interest in the content they were learning and in their current musical experience. The third written assessment was in the form of a summative quiz that was meant to measure the level of

student understanding and retention of the content that we were studying at the time (see Figure 10). This quiz was also used to gather data on the level of student engagement in the content based on their test scores. The self assessment rubrics were written for both of the musical pieces we were studying at the time, Darklands March and Disney Film Favorites, and were meant to provide a structured way for students to critically assess their prior performance of the musical elements we were focusing on, articulation and dynamics (see Figure 15). The self assessment rubric was meant to provide an example of how students could think critically and positively about their own musical performance to assess their own abilities and be able to determine which of their musical skills needed improvement. The recorded audio reflections were informal observations that I made on the perceived student reception of the techniques that I was trying to employ. These reflections were based on my own visual and aural observations made during lessons that I recorded after the completion of the lesson.

Student Enjoyment of Routine Humor

The first and most important theme that I noticed during this data collection and analysis process was that the students enjoyed the consistent use of humor through the joke of the day at the beginning of every lesson. Students seemed to be more inclined to engage with the material of the lesson when it was prefaced with a moment of levity through the use of planned humor. I intentionally planned these instances of levity to invite students to participate in a shared experience of joy and silliness at the beginning of every class period.

Figure 1:

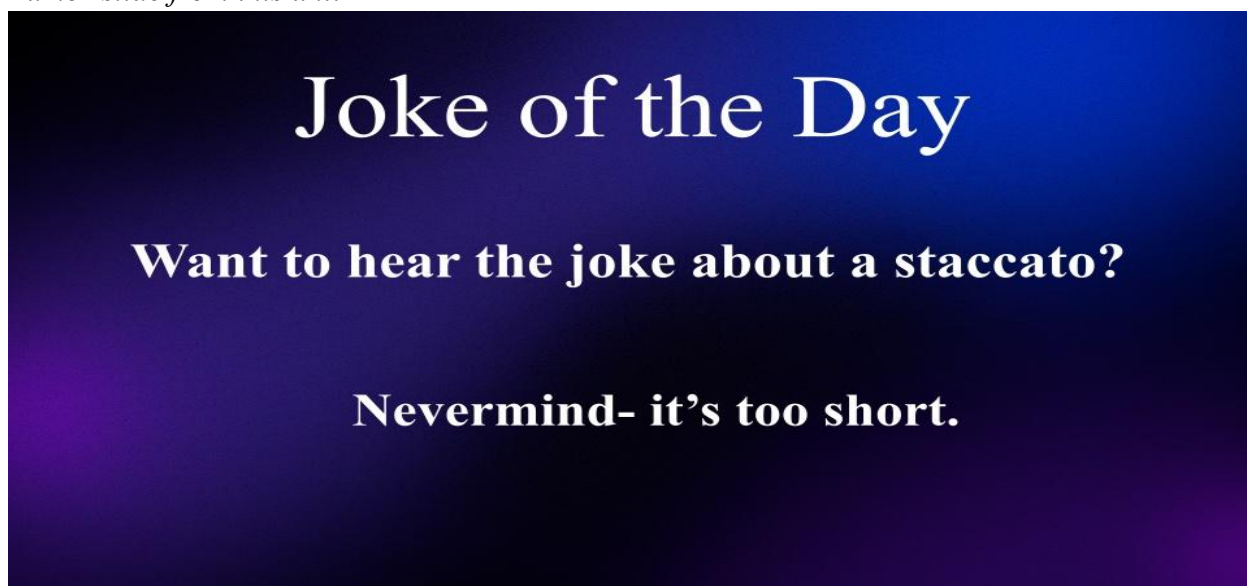
Excerpt from lesson plan number three.

Tell Music Instrument Joke- 30 seconds T: "Want to hear the joke about a staccato? Nevermind- it's too short."	Tell Music Instrument Joke- 30 seconds Students will learn a fun music joke.	Tell Music Instrument Joke- 30 seconds This is an attempt at play, to bring enjoyment into the lesson. Small actions like this are meant to keep the students entertained and engaged so they are less disruptive.	Tell Music Instrument Joke- 30 seconds Students will listen to the joke and hopefully laugh and want to share their own joke.
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This planned experience was meant to create a welcoming and inclusive environment within the classroom that the students would be excited to participate in each day when they came to the class. I started this process a few weeks before the collection of this data began and had already established student buy-in to the activity by the start of the unit. I included a visual representation in the class slides for the lesson to solidify the position of this activity into the class routine. Figure 2 is one of the humor slides used in this unit.

Figure 2:

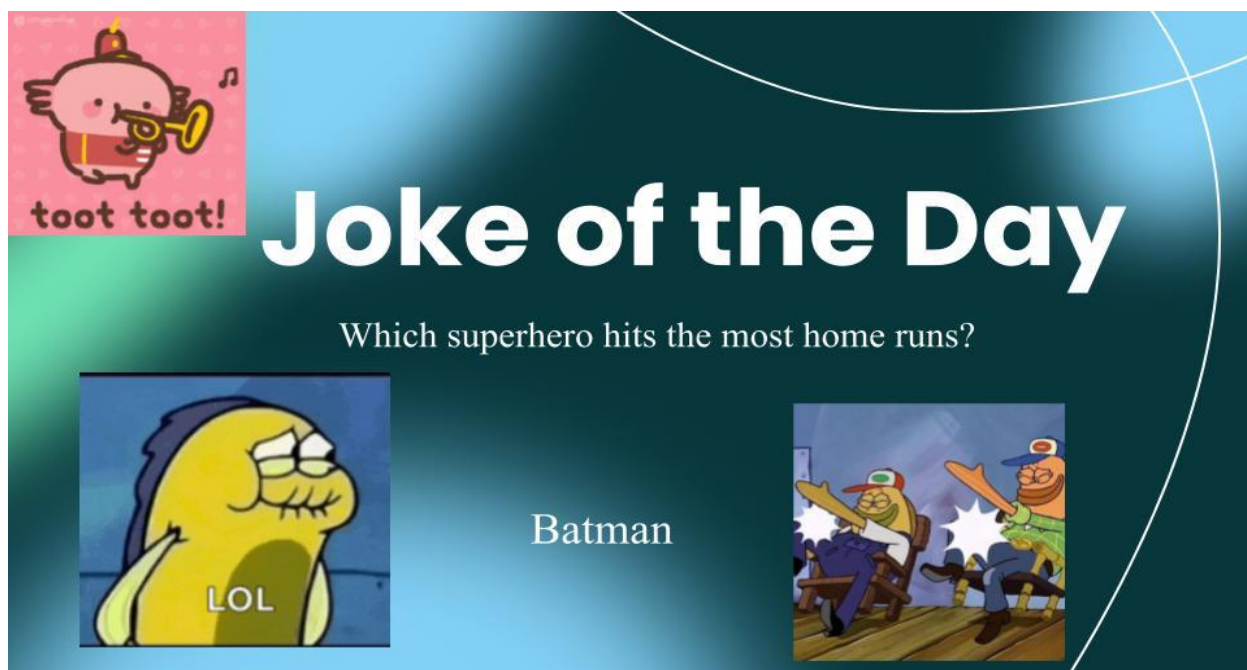
Humor slide from this unit



This slide is fairly dull looking and after I noticed how the students were anticipating this element as a part of their daily class routine and that they were gravitating towards the use of visuals during class instruction, I started to use brighter colors and more pictures and gifs to decorate the slide. After this adjustment I noticed that students were more engaged in the lesson, they were more excited to start each class, and they were ready to tell their own jokes. Figure 3 is a humor slide from a slide set that was used to teach a more recent lesson.

Figure 3:

Humor slide from a more recent unit



The joke of the day became our first call and response exercise of every lesson. I would tell the joke, let the students raise their hands and take a guess at the answer, then I would reveal the answer if no one guessed it. If students had their own school-appropriate joke to tell I would give them the floor for a brief time to tell their joke and hear their peers' responses before revealing the punchline. This brief exchange of power in the classroom allowed students to take a small piece of agency in their school day and pursue joy and happiness for both themselves and for their classmates. This practice of the pursuit of joy in the music classroom extends the research of Corinne Smith (2025) which describes joy in the music classroom as a shared experience that makes students more comfortable in the band room, it inspires them to continue their pursuit of musical expression, and it brightens their day when they are feeling sad. The decision to use the call and response method and this form of student agency in the brief time that they became the "co-teacher" to tell their joke was influenced by the research conducted by Edmund S. Adjapong and Christopher Emdin (2015) on the application of Hip Hop Pedagogy in the classroom. Two of the Hip-Hop pedagogical approaches that Adjapong & Emdin discuss in

their study *Rethinking Pedagogy In Urban Spaces: Implementing Hip Hop Pedagogy in the urban classroom* is the application of call and response and providing selected students with the personal agency to lead different portions of lesson as the student “co-teacher”.

The self determination theory (SDT) also influenced the decision to embed this verbal call and response of the joke of the day into the beginning of every lesson based on the assumption that the students would be naturally curious about the answer to the daily joke. This opportunity to participate in a shared experience of classroom levity gave students the chance to fulfill one of the psychological principles needed to generate intrinsic motivation: relatability. This action provided the opportunity for students to feel a part of the group through a shared experience of humor and the opportunity to be the provider of that humor. The ability to choose happiness, joy, and to have a sense of humor are important skills for students to develop as both musicians and as people. This routine of levity at the beginning of every lesson provided students with an example of what choosing to pursue joy and positivity can look and feel like.

One of the ways that I gathered data to support this theme was by recording audio journals after every lesson in the unit. In the following quote, I reflect on the opening routine:

The students are really responding to the humor that I am using in class. I’m intentionally using bad jokes to get a, sometimes fake, laugh from the students with the intention of trying to get them to participate in the activity and top my joke. I normally get at least two or three of them that will want to tell a different joke after I say mine.

I made a similar observation two days later while recording an audio reflection. The following quote describes the progress that this activity made towards creating student joy in the classroom through inclusion and planned humor:

The use of humor and cheesy jokes are going really well. Today one of the students guessed the punchline to my joke right away and I immediately had four different students excitedly raise their hands right after that wanted to tell me jokes that were better than the one that I used. The theory of using cheesy jokes as a way to motivate students to be involved and engaged in the activity seems to be working. It seems like the students are enjoying the inclusion of humor into their daily lessons.

In another observation, I described how student buy-in and participation in the moment of levity that the planned classroom humor provided supported the level of concentration and retention in the following instruction:

The students are fully engaged in the humor and joke sharing aspect of the lessons. My use of intentionally cheesy jokes are spurring multiple students to say better jokes and the whole class is starting to become more engaged with it. The class today was fully quiet while everyone was sharing their jokes and it really helped us switch into our rehearsal mode right after and have a really productive

rehearsal. I think it helped to get a little bit of the students' need to play out before having them focus on learning or rehearsing a task.

All three of these quotes track the progression of student buy-in and engagement into the activity of planned humor at the beginning of each lesson. These quotes are based on informal formative observations made during class rehearsals and were recorded shortly after each lesson was taught. The observations made during these recordings were based on interactions with students during large and isolated small group rehearsal as well as individual conversations and questions brought up during the lesson.

This data aligned with a piece of advice that my clinical instructor gave me in my first term of clinical teaching which was that everyone likes to play, and even though the way we like to play changes as we get older, enjoyment and happiness are always the outcome we are seeking. I took this advice and tried to inject fun and a sense of play into my lessons everyday and the students seemed to positively respond to it. This advice aligns with the ideas of Culturally Relevant Education (CRE) described in Ladson-Billings (1995) and is relevant to this study because it honors youth culture based on the idea of play and joy being a central element of the pedagogical approach (M. Schlabach, personal communication, October 6, 2025). I honored youth culture in multiple ways in this unit by including the use of humor and humorous visuals that students could relate to and take agency from and I chose to perform music that related to the interests of the students.

Another way that I gathered data that led to the discovery of this first theme was through the use of student survey questions about their level of enjoyment in the class

and things that they wish we did more more frequently. I used two different exit tickets in this unit where I asked students to rate their level of enjoyment in the class on a scale from one to five with five being the best and one being the worst experience (see Figure 4).

Figure 4:

Blank exit ticket from lesson one.

Name: _____
Class/Period: _____

Exit Ticket #1

1. What is articulation?
Articulation is _____

2. What is a marcato? Draw the symbol for a marcato.
A marcato is an articulation that is _____

3. What is a tenuto? Draw the symbol for a tenuto.
A tenuto is an articulation that makes notes _____

4. Did you have fun in band class today? How would you rate today's class on a scale of 1-5? (circle your answers below)

Yes		No		
1	2	3	4	5

5. What's something you like about being in the band?

I also asked them to name something that they liked about being in the band program. I used their numerical rating as data for this study and I used their responses to things they enjoyed in the band program to shape future lessons to meet their specific interests.

Figure 5:

Student response to exit ticket from lesson one.

Exit Ticket #1

1. What is articulation?

Articulation is How individual notes are attacked, sustained, and released

2. What is a marcato? Draw the symbol for a marcato.

A marcato is an articulation that is Articulation, Short and accented

3. What is a tenuto? Draw the symbol for a tenuto.

A tenuto is an articulation that makes notes Articulation, smooth and connected

4. Did you have fun in band class today? How would you rate today's class on a scale of 1-5? (circle your answers below)

Yes No

1 2 3 4 5

5. What's something you like about being in the band?

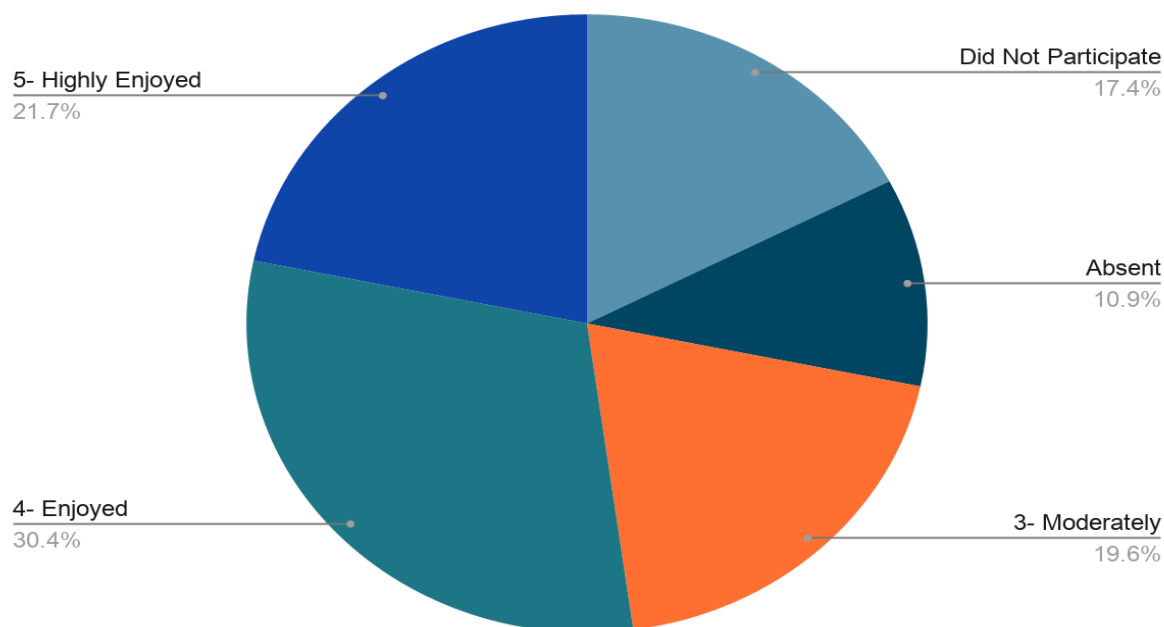
I like playing music

Questions four and five on exit ticket one (Figure 4) , provide an example of a student's response to this numerical rating system and the question about their personal interest. Every single student's answer to question five featured some kind of interest in

playing music either by themselves or with their friends. One of my favorite student responses came from a student who wrote that they enjoyed being in the band because “it’s really satisfying to figure something out that I’ve been struggling on”. This quote exemplifies the type of joy and excitement that the process of learning music can produce. The joy of personal accomplishment is one of the most exciting things to see in a young music student because it is normally accompanied by an increase in personal confidence and the development of intrinsic motivation.

Five students (10.9%) were absent the day that the first exit ticket was used and eight students (17.4%) chose not to participate by leaving their exit ticket blank. Out of the 33 students that participated in this assessment, 24 of them (52.1%) indicated through question four that they were either enjoying (30.4%) or highly enjoying (21.7%) their classroom experience and only nine students (19.6%) indicated that they were only moderately enjoying their classroom experience.

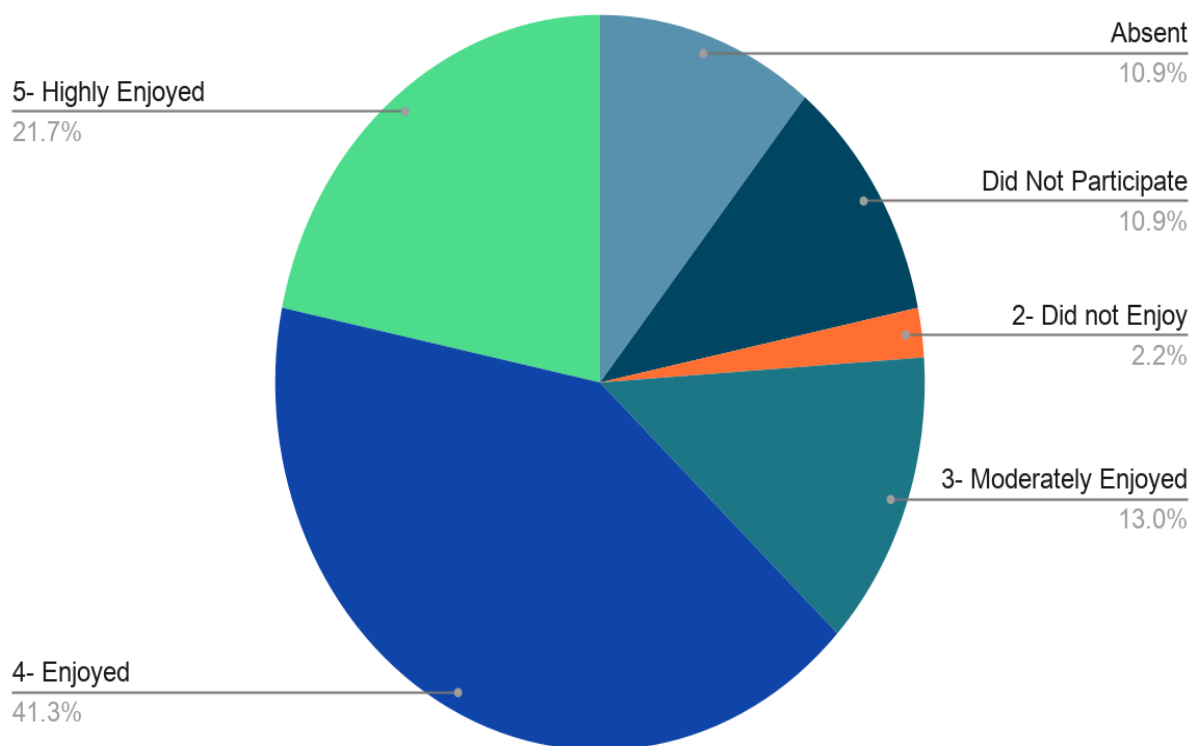
Figure 6:
Exit ticket #1: Measuring student joy in class



This data collection could be improved by adding more specificity to the instructions of the question prompt and by adding more questions for students to provide additional feedback through.

Using the same one to five scale, students responded more positively to the same question on exit ticket two in the following lesson. On the day that the second exit ticket was given to the students five of them were absent (10.9%) and five of them chose not to participate (10.9%) in the activity by leaving their exit ticket blank. Out of the 36 students that participated in the activity, 29 students (63%) indicated that they either enjoyed (41.3%) or highly enjoyed (21.7%) their classroom experience during this lesson and only one student (2.2%) did not enjoy the class. Figure 7 presents this data visually:

Figure 7:
Exit ticket #2: Measuring student joy in class



Increase in student retention from consistent emphasis and encouragement

The second theme that emerged from this data was that students became more engaged and retained more of the content of the lessons when they were being supplied with consistent emphasis and encouragement to reinforce their learning. For example, one of the forms of consistent emphasis and encouragement applied in this unit was the use of providing positive encouragement and support to students during our daily rehearsals. This consistent emphasis included positive affirmations and personal encouragement to individual students to keep them in a positive mindset and to help fuel their motivation to continue their musical practice. This action connects to and extends the study of Duncan-Andrade (2009) because it emphasized the importance of maintaining hope in the classroom. Hope is an integral part of joy and is an essential element needed for students to begin to develop their own intrinsic motivation.

In this unit we covered both the concepts of dynamic contrast and articulation but I only emphasized and encouraged one of these concepts in our daily lessons. I made the decision to only emphasize the concepts of dynamic contrast in the warmup routine of each lesson in the unit because I was noticing that the students had not fully grasped the mechanical technique of producing a crescendo and decrescendo on their instrument yet and I did not want to overload them with too many things to think about at once. Since we were not consistently reviewing, emphasizing, and encouraging the use of the specific articulation that we were discussing, the majority of the students did not retain the articulation information that we previously covered. This data led to the realization that I was not providing the necessary emphasis needed for students to retain all of the information we were covering and I needed to adjust my pedagogical approach to focus on a narrower goal next time this material is taught.

This theme is connected to the overarching purpose of this study because one of the sources of joy that can be found in the music classroom is the development and retention of understanding for previously unknown knowledge. Through consistent positive emphasis and encouragement students can start to develop confidence in their personal ability to attain and develop a desired skill. This consistent positive support also helps to build trust with students and makes the band room a more welcoming and accepting space that students want to be. See Figure 8 & 9 below for two separate student responses to question number five on exit ticket number one (see Figure 4) that shows the development in their confidence that is derived from the musical progress they have made in the band.

Figure 8:

Student statement that shows developing personal confidence

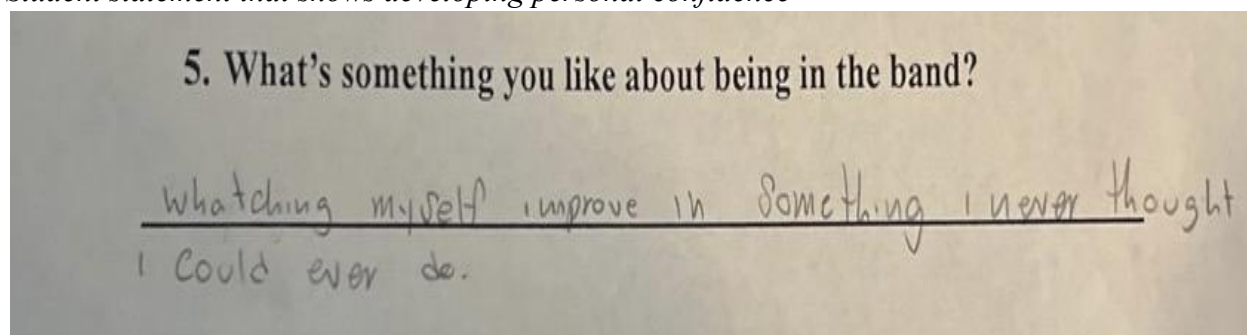
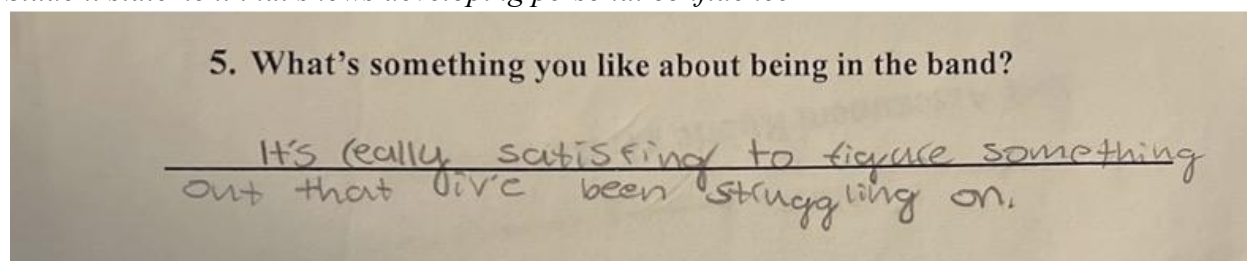


Figure 9:

Student statement that shows developing personal confidence



The formative assessment data from both exit ticket one and exit ticket two showed that almost 100% of the students retained the information that we covered that day in class. This data reflects that the students' understood the content we were covering that day and that they were engaged with the lesson enough to retain the information we discussed at the beginning of class.

Unfortunately the data gathered from the summative quiz in the third lesson of this unit reflected that students' long term retention was highly reliant on routine verbal or visual reminders during rehearsals and was not being reinforced through individual work. Figure 10 presents an example from a student who only retained the information that was emphasized during our daily lessons.

Figure 10:

An example of the average student response to this assessment.

40 Lesson plan 3

Name: [redacted] 2-26-20

Class/Period: 4 band

Quiz

- Dynamic contrast is going from loud to soft or soft to loud
~~high to low~~ ^{loud} ^{soft} ^{soft}
~~of sound~~ ^{loud} ^{high} ^{low} ^{soft} ^{loud}
 Dynamic contrast describes the volume of sound
- A crescendo is going from soft to loud
~~from one pitch to another~~
 The musical symbol for a crescendo looks like this:
 $\curvearrowright$
- A decrescendo is going from loud to soft
~~from high to low~~
 The musical symbol for a decrescendo looks like this:
 $\curvearrowleft$
- Articulation is different ways sounds are started and stopped
~~different notes~~ ^{-yes and no} ^{how notes}
- A marcato is high notes a heavy short articulation (staccato and accent)
 The symbol for a marcato looks like this:
- A tenuto is an articulation marking telling you to play the note for full value, smooth, and connected
~~low notes~~
 The symbol for a tenuto looks like this:
- Are you excited for the concert next week? kind of my first solo
- What's something you wish we did more of in band class?
play more songs

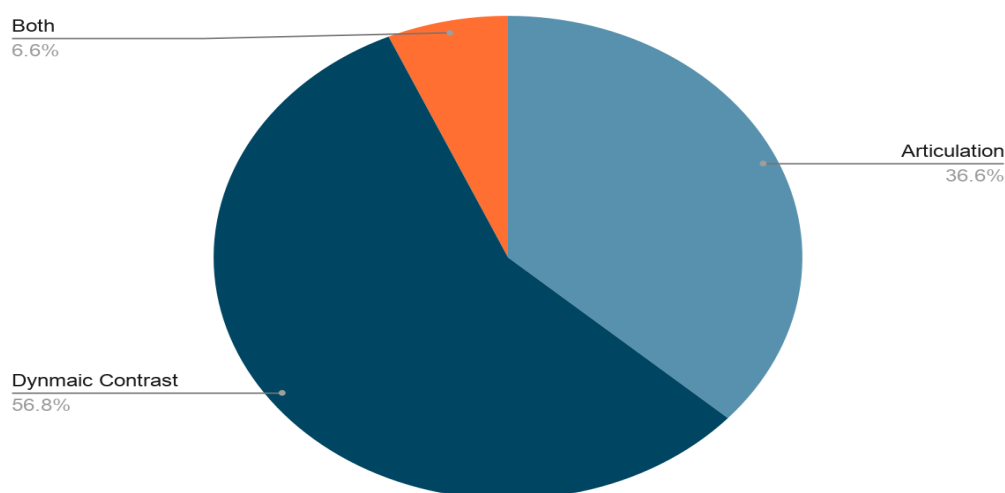
Good start! We are going to review these concepts as a class again next week. A good way to separate these two ideas is to remember that dynamics refer to volume and articulation is how the note started and stopped.

This example shows that students retained more information that we covered on dynamic contrast than they did on the concepts of articulation covered in this unit. This result is not

incredibly surprising since I consistently emphasized the concepts of dynamic contrast through the use of crescendos and decrescendos more heavily in our daily scale warmup more than I emphasized the use of articulation through the marcato and tenuto articulation in this unit. The consistent practice of applying the concept of dynamic contrast on a daily basis during our warmup routine and during the rehearsal of the selected repertoire pieces helped cement the concept into the students' minds. When students were consistently reminded and encouraged to apply dynamic contrast they were actively developing a deeper personal understanding of the concept for themselves as they completed the physical actions needed to accomplish the desired result on their instrument.

The quiz from lesson three of this unit (see Figure 8) showed that most of the students had a better understanding of the material that we covered on dynamic contrast, like crescendo and decrescendo, than they did on the articulation material that we discussed. 56.8% of students answered the questions on dynamic contrast correctly while only 36.6% of students answered the questions on articulation correctly and only 6.6% of students answered all the questions in both sections correctly (See Figure 11).

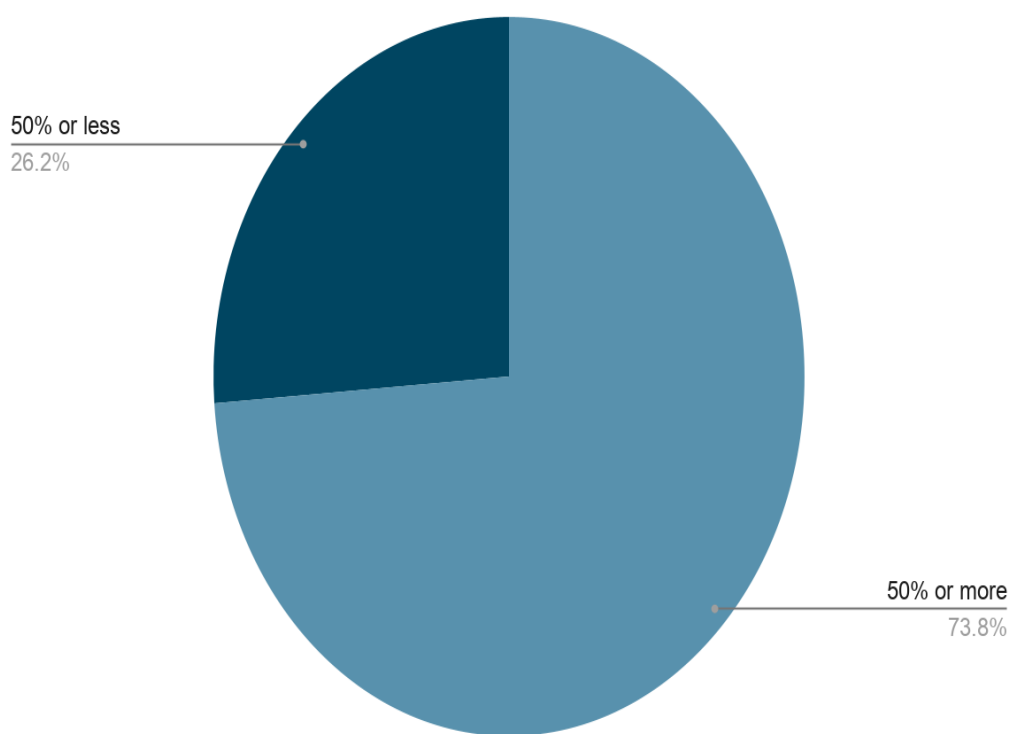
Figure 11:
Quiz questions answered correctly by students



This data shows that students understood the concept of dynamic contrast better than the concepts of articulation that we discussed. The students performed well on the quiz with 73.9% of them scoring at least a 3.5 or higher and only 26.2% of them scoring a three or lower as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12:

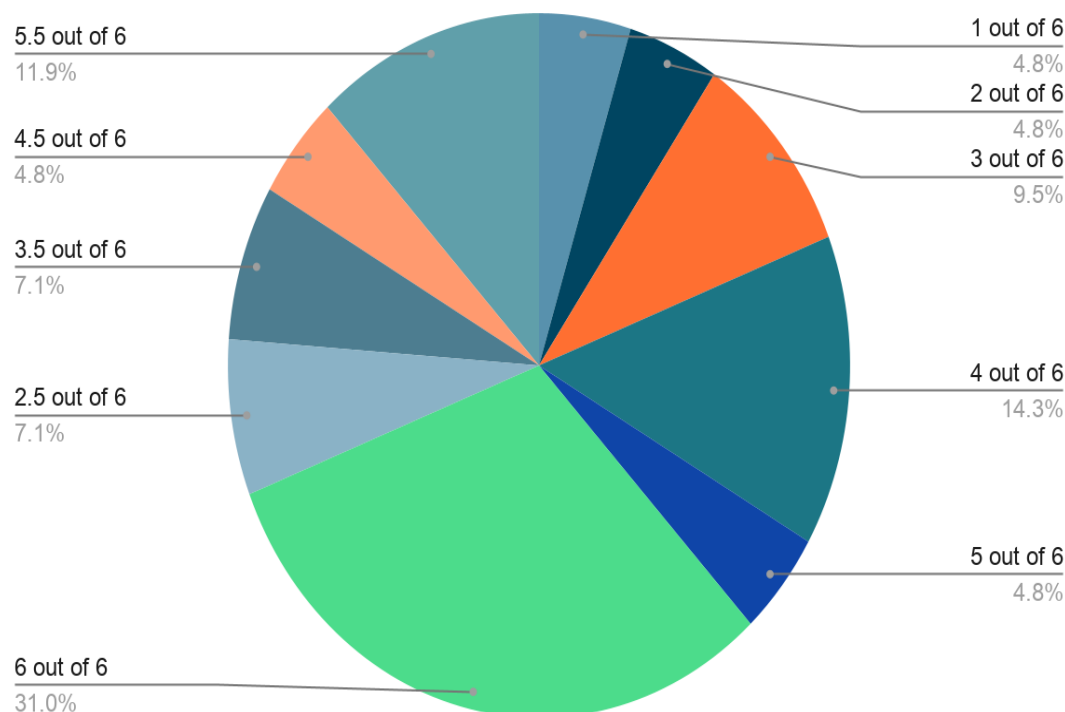
Students that understood at least 50% of the unit material



This means that the majority of the students in the class understood and retained at least half of the material covered in the first two lessons of this unit. This data shows that the majority of the students were still

The overall scores from this summative quiz were pretty evenly spread out but the largest group at 31% were the students that scored a perfect six out of six by answering every question correctly. This class scored a mean score of 4.3, a median score of 4.5, and a mode score of six.

Figure 13:
Overall student quiz scores



These scores provide evidence that almost 75% of students understood the majority of the information that was being presented to them. This data provided the realization that to fully engage all of the students in the classroom I would need to adjust my pedagogical approach to include equal emphasis of the content we are covering and more written assignments that can be used as future reference tools for the students to access outside of class.

Establishing expectations for student behavior and practice routine

The third theme that emerged from this data was that expectations for classroom behavior and student practice routines needed to be established. I made and posted a classroom expectations poster (see Figure 14) to provide a set of written visual reminders for the students to see everyday and to reference during instruction.

Figure 14:
Classroom expectations poster



I decided to make this poster to help establish the necessary classroom expectations for students to develop their own intrinsic motivation. These expectations are simple and only ask a few things of the students: to come to class with a positive attitude, to be nice to each other, to have their class materials including a pencil everyday, and to practice at home. This poster focuses on two main concepts: being positive and being prepared. It emphasizes that the student is an important part of the larger group and that they need to practice on their own and bring a pencil with their other musical materials to class everyday. It takes very little to be prepared for band

class and by having this simple reminder posted in the classroom, I created a visual checklist for students to see everyday as they came into the band room.

I employed the use of a self assessment rubric to help the students think critically and assess their own musical abilities in a positive way. This was a way to provide students with a structured format for them to set expectations and musical goals for themselves. This rubric had students think positively about their performance by having them name something they did well while performing and it also had them think critically about three things that they need to keep working on at home in their individual practice time. The rubric also featured a one to five numbering system with clear descriptions to help the students analyze and relate to their own musical playing (see Figure 15).

Figure 15:

Self assessment rubric for students to think critically about their playing

Name: _____

Self Assessment Rubric #1: Articulation

Disney Medley:

1. Please circle one of the following boxes that best describes your in class performance of this piece.

1	2	3	4	5
I did not play any of the articulations. I am fully focused on just notes and rhythms.	I played some of the articulations but not many of them. I am still working on notes and rhythms.	I played at least half of the articulations but I still need to practice the rest of them.	I played most of the articulations but I did not play them all.	I played every single articulation perfectly.

2. What is something that you played really well in this practice performance that you are proud of?

3. What are some things that you need to keep working on at home in your own practice time? (Name 3 specific things)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

The majority of musical progression happens outside of rehearsals during individual practice time. Being able to determine what material needs to be worked on to improve is an important skill for beginning musicians to develop. By utilizing the self assessment rubrics, I established a clear example for students to use as reference while setting their own individual practice goals. When students are provided with the proper tools to assess and develop their own musical ability through proper practice methods and positive self reflection, the barriers to more challenging musical concepts are removed or minimized and students move one step closer to the joy of understanding and being able to apply a new musical concept on their instrument. This action extends the research on student centered instruction of Brown (2008) because it is entirely focused on providing a structured framework for students to develop their own learning strategy during their individual practice sessions.

This theme relates to the overarching purpose of this study because setting attainable classroom goals for students to have consistent opportunities for success and encouragement while also teaching them how to think critically about their own playing so they can set their own musical goals is important for their musical development. Established classroom expectations help students set personal goals for themselves and is a great way for students to build individual confidence and buy-in to the musical process.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

I utilized Adjapong & Emdin's (2015) suggestions and extended their research by including call and response and co-teaching at the beginning of every lesson. The most impactful use of this approach was through the inclusion of jokes at the beginning of every lesson through the daily joke of the day. I would present a slide with a cheesy joke and allow students to tell their own jokes for the class to guess. I intentionally picked simple puns and silly jokes so that the students would feel like they could one up my jokes with their own. The simple act of inviting students to participate and potentially lead a shared experience of joy and silliness at the beginning of each lesson built trust through a consistent routine that was based around individual student input and leadership. The practice of including small opportunities for students to lead the class during the the levity section of the instruction extends the work of Julie K. Brown (2008) on involving students in the instruction of their ensemble. Once this routine was established, students began to look forward to the joke of the day and were more engaged in the lesson that followed. This data also extends the work of Ruth Gurgel (2015) because taking responsibility for initiating positive relationships contributed to the construction of an environment where students felt like they were active contributors to their learning process. Once this practice was established, I noticed that students were more receptive to my instruction and were more engaged in the overall lesson.

The increase in student engagement and interest in the lessons following the shared moment of levity at the beginning of each lesson provided evidence that extends the research of Ahn, Chui, & Patrick (2021) on the connection between teacher and student motivation. I created structured opportunities for student choice and input to encourage the students to feel more engaged in their own learning through the call and response joke telling exercise. Also, once I

created the perception of increased personal motivation and effort in the instruction of their lessons through the use of visual slides and jokes, the students began to react more positively to my instruction. Once the students saw that I was putting effort into consistently creating materials for their instruction, especially when I included their personal interests that we discussed in class in those materials, they gained a new respect for what I was trying to teach them and we started to build positive rapport in the classroom. I also continued to build trust with my students by including more of my personal interest and character into the planning of these lessons with the intention of letting the students get to know me better as a person and not just their teacher. By allowing the students to get to know me better I can find more things that I have in common with them that we can both relate to. Creating consistent opportunities to culturally and personally relate to students is one of the strategies I used to build trust and inspire intrinsic motivation in my students. Instilling levity and positive intention to the beginning of each lesson helped motivate students to engage in the material that followed.

The data from this study also extends the research of Patricia Campbell (2022) and Corinne Smith (2025) on the connective power of music and the multiple forms of joy that exist within the band room. Creating joy through the use of planned levity is more than just making students laugh. Creating an environment based on fun and enjoyment is an intentional action to set a positive precedent within the classroom. Students should be excited to come to their band class everyday and starting each lesson on a positive, and sometimes silly, note sets the tone for the rest of the lesson. If students are in a good mood and feel positive at the beginning of the lesson then they will be more inclined to participate and retain the information that we are covering.

The music that was chosen for study in this unit was selected specifically with the students' interests in mind. For this section we were performing a medley of Disney Film Favorites and a march called Darklands March that came with a high fantasy backstory to the music. These pieces, as well as the pictures and memes used on the visual slides for each lesson, were chosen with the intention of extending the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) on the use of culturally relevant material in the classroom. Students were more engaged in the learning process when we were working on music that they had previous interest and experiences with. The majority of the students were familiar with the Disney songs featured in the medley and showed excitement when we first passed the music out. A large number of the students in this band are members of the school's D&D club and were very attracted to the high fantasy backstory that came with the music. By choosing content to study that the students already had an interest in and that they could relate to created opportunities for students to access their own joy and create their own motivation to learn the music. The success of learning this music was more impactful on the level of student joy in the classroom than the pieces we studied in the previous semester because the students were able to create a personal connection to the music based on their own interests.

Limitations

I was able to utilize most of the guiding pedagogical questions of joy that were discussed in chapter one but I was not able to emphasize each point with the historically responsive literacy as discussed in the writings of Gholdy Muhammad (2020). The only tenet that I had a hard time fulfilling was number three "how does my curriculum and instruction elevate beauty within humanity?" (Muhammad, 2023, P. 70). This tenet was difficult to meet because I had no control over the visual representation featured within the classroom and I had very little control over the

actual content and types of assignments that I was allowed to dedicate time to as a part of this study. I couldn't spend a lot of time on discussions or activities that took away from the in class rehearsal time. I included diverse recordings and visual representations in my unit slides but I was not able to change any of the posters or make a rotating bulletin board presentation that would allow for additional elevation of the beauty of humanity through music and the arts. The implication of this limitation on future research is that the conductor of the study needs to be in full control of the environment they are conducting their research in to be able to make use of different culturally appropriate visuals to be used throughout the classroom.

One of the biggest limitations to this study was that, as a student teacher, I was not in full control of the testing environment and I had a very limited ability to establish and uphold expectations within this classroom. This means that I had to conduct my study within the confines of a program that did not provide the necessary instruction and materials to allow for greater analysis. There were no records of student progress or any expectations for students to complete written notes or keep an organized binder for this class. This lack of data and consistent assessment practices made it difficult to plan multiple written assignments because the students were not prepared or motivated to complete written work for a class that generally didn't require it. They were also not prepared to keep this work organized in a way that would make it useful for future reference of the material after it was returned to them. Since there was no expectation to keep an organized binder for this class, most of the written work that the students completed either ended up being left on the floor at the end of the class or being crumpled into a ball in their back packs. The implication of this limitation is very similar to the previous paragraph's implication because it also shows the need for the conductor of the study to be in control of the

testing environment so they can establish positive classroom expectations that affect the gathering and retention of information.

The results of this study provide only a limited view of the students in this program because it only tested one out of six band classes at the school, the data is based on the analysis of only seven questions, and the length of this study was limited to a five lesson unit. The small testing group limits the results of this study because it does not give an adequate representation of the entire program. The limited number of questions does not provide enough material to accurately represent the depth of student understanding because it does not provide students with enough opportunities to show their understanding of the content being studied. A small amount of data can be gathered from this study but it does not provide a comprehensive look at the program due to the limited number of questions and the small testing group. In the future, this study could be improved by emulating the practice of Zou, Yao, Zhang, & Huang(2024) by enlarging the testing group and increasing the amount of questions to provide a more comprehensive set of data. The future implication of this limitation is that students need to be provided with more opportunities to show the depth of their understanding of the content being studied and the questions used to measure their joy need to be more specific to provide more impactful student data.

Other teachers could apply my pedagogical approach of using levity in the classroom to create a welcoming environment that fosters intrinsic motivation and achieve a similar level of success. The process I used is fairly simple and did not take a lot of effort to put together. Most of the jokes that I used I found through online searches for “jokes, puns, and riddles for kids”. Other teachers and researchers could improve upon this study by increasing the size of the testing group and the amount of questions in the assessments, by being in control of the testing

environment and providing more culturally appropriate visual representations throughout the room.

Conclusion

This study examined the ability of an inclusive classroom built on joy to inspire intrinsic motivation in students. Evidence from this study shows that students are more motivated to engage in the music learning process when they feel welcome in the classroom, they have fun during the lesson, and they have a personal interest in the content they are studying. I learned that I could use a short joke of the day section at the beginning of each lesson to capture and engage the attention of my students for the rest of the class period. The use of levity and the invitation for student input and participation at the beginning of each lesson helped to build trust with the students while putting them in a positive mindset before starting the main section of the day's instruction. When extending this research in the future I would make adjustments to my approach to improve the quality of data that I was able to gather. To improve the quality of future research on this subject I will increase the size of the testing group to get a more accurate representation of the full band program, I will make sure I am in control of the testing environment so I can apply the use of culturally appropriate visual representation throughout the classroom, and I will increase the number and the specificity of the assessment questions used to measure student retention of the information we are studying.

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