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**Informal Learning in the Band Room:
Facilitating High School Band Students' Aural Learning
through Student-led Practices**

In the stereotypical traditional band classroom, the teacher leads the rehearsal and advises students on necessary musical corrections needed to enhance performance quality; students should not talk; and the major focus is on performing traditional band music. This rehearsal style and music may be irrelevant to students' lives outside of the band classroom. Lucy Green's (2001, 2008) investigation of informal music learning practices indicate that musicians outside of formal music education learn music in very different ways than the methods set up in large ensemble classrooms. They choose music for themselves; copy recordings aurally; work in peer-directed small groups; acquire information in a haphazard fashion using whole pieces of music; and they utilize personal creativity throughout the process (Green, 2008).

For my dissertation, I sought to identify what methods formally trained band students would use if allowed to work in an informal, student-led, small group setting. The purpose of my study was to investigate high school band students' processes, attitudes, and perceived benefits of an aural-based learning project in this informal setting. I conducted a qualitative study over an eight-week period utilizing a case study design with multiple embedded cases. Data collection included observation, audio- and video-recordings, field notes, and interviews. I recorded and observed four student groups made up of five students each. I interviewed each group three to four times throughout

the project, individual students within those groups at least once, and their band teacher three times.

For the study itself, I implemented an aural-based learning project with a high school band during regular schools days of the fall semester 2011. The project occurred for an entire 50-minute class period one time per week for seven weeks with additional days added in for interviews. Students worked in small groups of five people that they formed on their own. Their objective was to arrange and play as a small group a cover of a popular song of their choice. They had six weeks to create their arrangements and on the seventh week, they performed their arrangements for each other. Students did not receive sheet music for their songs, but instead learned their songs by ear, making all of the musical decisions to create and perform their arrangements. The small groups were completely student-run with little to no instruction from the teacher or myself. Data reporting includes with-in case analysis of groups as well as cross-case analysis to identify noteworthy similarities and differences in students' processes, responses and attitudes about the project. The data suggest that students enjoyed the aural learning aspect of the project, the open-endedness and creative process it allowed them, the ability to collaborate with small groups, and the change of pace in the large ensemble classroom. Students perceived that their aural and collaborative skills improved and that they gained confidence in their individual playing abilities. Implications for praxis and suggestions for future research are discussed.