

Caron L. Collins, Ph.D.



Danni Gilbert, Ph.D.



Applying the CCC Approach to Elementary, Secondary, and Collegiate Performing Ensembles

Abstract:

Based upon previously completed research, the purpose of this action research project was to collect data that may be used to revise or affirm the **Curious, Collaborative, Creativity** approach within elementary, secondary, and collegiate performing ensembles. Results indicated that students were more engaged and invested in the learning process.

Problem Addressed:

Performing ensembles traditionally have strong underpinnings in teacher-centered instruction connected to competitive and high-stakes concerts. Results typically produce musicians who are dependent upon ensemble directors and possess limited knowledge and skills necessary to perform beyond ensemble experiences. However, positive changes in educational reform and policies, such as the *National Coalition for Core Arts Standards* and the framework promoted by the *Partnership for 21st Century Learning*, allow learning to focus more on the process rather than the product.

Can “Curious, Collaborative Creativity” provide ensemble directors with an approach for developing a student-centered learning environment within school music ensembles, while promoting opportunities for musical independence and collective musicianship?

Methodology:

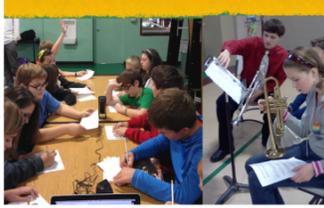
In this project, evidence was collected by Dr. Caron Collins from three separate performing ensembles, each led by different teachers who piloted the approach:

1. St. Mary’s School elementary band in Canton, NY, taught by Crane undergraduate music education students in their Instrumental Practicum Course;
2. Willsboro NY Central School, a secondary-level 40-member chorus taught by Jennifer Moore;
3. Vernon-Verona-Sherrill NY Central School elementary-secondary orchestra program of 150 students taught by a Kathryn Hess.

Dr. Danni Gilbert collected evidence of application of this approach with the Doane College Pep Band. The school ensembles and teachers involved in this project followed the principles of the CCC approach, evaluated its application in their ensembles, measured the success of student achievement of the National Core Music Standards, and observed the development of 21st century skills of *critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity*.

Each ensemble was asked to implement the three steps of the CCC approach and provide evaluative feedback. Instructors were provided with an unpublished draft digital CCC handbook to follow and utilize in their teaching/directing of their school ensembles. Video recordings and personal observations at the participating schools documented the progress of the students through this approach. Written reflections, rubric measurements, and video recordings of the “Informances” provided student assessments and outcomes.

Step 1: Curiosity



In the first step, music is selected through a democratic process in which students generated a “wish-list” of music to be studied and performed based on their interests.

Step 2: Collaboration



Next, students are divided into teams to work together within the full ensemble and share the responsibilities of planning, rehearsing, reflecting, and evaluating.

Step 3: Creativity



Finally, the ensembles culminate their efforts by facilitating an “Informance” to demonstrate the process of teaching and learning over the course of the semester, inform stakeholders, and involve the audience in the music-making experience.

Results:

Upon implementing the CCC model, initial results indicated that while students seemed more engaged and invested in the learning process, they sometimes struggled with selecting and arranging repertoire appropriate to the ability level of the group. Collegiate teams, although initially enthusiastic, sometimes faltered in their responsibilities when faced with other college obligations. Further application and investigation of the CCC approach in performing ensembles will include the need for continued guidance from teachers with repertoire selection, composing and arranging techniques, and motivating students to fulfill their responsibilities throughout the process. Feedback from the participating teachers and students will further develop this approach and improve the content of the CCC e-Handbook. Examples of CCC applications, photos, and video recordings from the participating schools will be included in the final published CCC e-handbook.



There are some moments you could never forget even if you tried and handing over the reins to my student is one of those moments. We were working on an example from the method book and I told her that she could be the teacher for the day. Her eyes got so big and she was grinning from ear to ear saying that she never had the opportunity to be the teacher before. She did hesitate to give me some suggestions on how to work on that example, so together we collaborated on some ideas to try. By playing and reviewing the example with her ideas, her engagement skyrocketed. Knowing that the music improved with her decisions, created a sense of accomplishment and ownership.



Providing students opportunities to actively contribute to the Doane Tiger Pep Band increased their sense of ownership, pride, and enjoyment in participation. Through implementation of the CCC approach, students were involved with teaching, composing, conducting, and networking. For example, senior journalism major, Chance Busey (pictured above, right), used his strengths and interests as our Outreach Manager to design a Facebook page, upload videos and recordings of our Informances to YouTube, connect with alumni, and collaborate with the Spirit and Athletic Departments. Future plans for the ensemble include encouraging contributions from a greater number of students and seeking ways to further engage audience members.

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Curious, Collaborative Creativity Participant Observations

www.curiouscollaborativecreativity.com

Caron Collins, Ph.D. SUNY Potsdam, collincl@potsdam.edu

Danni Gilbert, Ph.D. Doane College, danni.gilbert@doane.edu

Derek Bull:

I had a successful semester integrating the CCC approach into my teaching. When I met with my student for private lessons, I witnessed much success by igniting his natural curiosity in understanding the construction of the major scale. Using an intuitive and questioning approach, I was able to guide my student to develop his own understanding of the fingerings while using critical listening to figuring out the notes for a new major scale. We also spent part of the semester collaborating on a composition with the students in this program, which turned out well, as the home-schooled students combined their knowledge of notes, rhythm, articulations, and other musical factors into the passage they created. I am fortunate to have experienced this approach, and have certainly integrated much of its philosophy and approach into my own teaching.

Olivia Rehm:

My first experience with the Curious, Collaborative Creativity (CCC) approach was with two elementary aged home-schooled sisters in a semi-private setting. I loved working with the students and they were eager to learn, but the approach didn't work well for their situation. They came from a very structured background and the family wasn't very open to using this progressive approach. I believe some aspects of the CCC approach could be used in to a small group, traditional setting, but using the entire approach proved too progressive for my particular situation. However, I did have the opportunity to work with a beginning band that had a larger number of students participating in the CCC approach. I witnessed the students involved in their learning and were very eager to do the creative projects. Because this group only met once a week, they weren't getting very much playing time on their instruments. But in a band setting where the students meet more than once a week, I can see the CCC approach being very effective for developing a greater understanding of the music.

Jacqueline Saunier:

Using the CCC approach, I taught two 4th grade students who were both beginning to learn flute for the first time in school. Since the foundation of CCC is to allow students to influence the direction of their education, I feel as though the nature of this experience for them was surely enriching and gratifying. Their interests became the bedrock of the semester's curriculum, in both their private lessons as well as the band ensemble setting, which meant that they had chosen what they wanted the vehicles of learning to be. A positive learning environment was created when the students' curiosity and creativity were valued as the most important parts of the learning process. As I worked with my flute students in their private lessons to develop fundamental musical skills and knowledge, we collaborated as a group to accomplish their personal goals. My students were interested in learning how to play some of their favorite pop tunes on the flute, and so I provided them with necessary materials, resources, and an open stage for them to be curious and collaborative. There were moments when they worked together to solve musical problems, and also acted as role models for each other as they progressed throughout the semester. By the end, each student had accomplished a significant amount of their performance goals, and definitely had a deeper understanding of how music was playing a role in their lives. My students seemed to enjoy themselves, and I was happy to allow their creativity to drive the nature of their education.

Nik Seger:

Teaching the Responding Team during my experience with CCC very enlightening. As a student, had this assignment been given to me, I would have drawn a picture of *Belah Sun Woman*. I would have responded visually to the music by using descriptions of her to depict the image I was imagining. However, I wanted the experience to come solely from the students, so I kept my idea to myself in order for the students to be spontaneous and creative with their own responses. Once I described the objective of the activity, they began brainstorming and came to the conclusion that they would respond to the music through dance. They created motions to each phrase that represented the emotions of the piece. It was difficult for me to let go of my control of the lesson and encourage their own ideas, rather than press them to follow my thought process of creating drawings. The process was completely student driven, and the end result meaningful and informative. Having students take control of the unit proved to be much more effective and enriching than if I had taken a traditional approach.

Jenelle Yeoman:

Creating through Collaboration opens up a vast variety of opportunities to utilize in any type of a music classroom. Creativity allows for self-discovery, expression, and meaningful application that the students can personalize for a memorable experience. In the fall of 2015, my beginning band students, consisting of 4th and 5th graders, worked together to create a composition in the style of "Peter and The Wolf." We combined our ideas together to make one cohesive story. Students discussed which sounds and musical motives would be appropriate for the different parts in the story. Since these were beginning band students, we used a combination of written and created notation. Some students took the initiative to involve their parents to help them create parts of the composition at home. To finish the composition, we took portions of the story and added their own music to it. My beginning band students discovered how musical composers worked and applied the process to their own ideas through collaborating with their peers. I encourage all ensemble teachers to take a creative approach. This truly creates a positive learning environment that sets up your students for success.

The above teachers are senior music education students from The Crane School of Music, participating through their Instrumental Practicum Course teaching beginning band students.