

Design and Implementation of a Unit on Improvisation
for First-year Instrumental Students

by

Kari Mathews-Ricks

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the



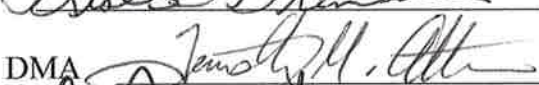


Requirements for

Master of Arts in Music Education

School of Graduate Studies

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

The Thesis Committee

	Signature	Date
Janita K. Byars, Ed.D.		11/28/07
Leslie Drennan		11/28/07
Timothy M. Altman, DMA		11/28/07
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Kathleen Hilton, Ph.D.		12-6-07

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INTRODUCTION

The action researcher is a band director in the public schools of Robeson County and has been, for the past six years, teaching first-year band. This has been her first teaching position. In this time, she has based her lesson plans on the music portion of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS). These objectives are based on the National Standards for Arts Education. In the NCSCOS, the third objective calls for the use of improvisation starting with the first year of instrumental instruction. The researcher has an education-based background in jazz study, having played in the jazz band in middle and high school as well as three years on the university level. She was also required to introduce the concept of improvisation to the high school jazz band in which she did her student teaching. Even with this background, this investigator was unsure how to include this practice in the first year of instrumental instruction due to the students' lack of acquired skill on their individual instruments. For this reason, the researcher has minimized this objective in the past. This thesis topic was chosen to gain knowledge and develop skills for including this objective into her band curriculum and to document this process for reference by others.

SUBJECTS USED

Two sixth-grade band classes from Deep Branch and Oxendine Elementary Schools participated in this study. The age of these students ranged from 11 to 12 years old. "Sixth-Grade Band" is the first year of instrumental education at both of these schools. While students have taken general music classes since first grade, improvisation has rarely been addressed. Music is highly valued in school communities as is the ability to play or sing by ear. This study was part of the band curriculum. The researcher

obtained parental permission for student participation through a consent form (see Appendix A).

RESEARCH QUESTION/HYPOTHESIS

What methodology for teaching improvisation is available to the beginning band music teacher? What is the level of increase in band students' skill and musical confidence as a result of participating in an improvisation unit focusing on the twelve-bar blues?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In reviewing the related literature, the researcher will focus on four main topics. First, the researcher will attempt to answer the question: What is improvisation? Second, the researcher will establish the reason for the inclusion of improvisation in the National Standards and consequently the NCSCOS. Third, the benefits of the addition of improvisation in the first year of instrumental instruction will be discussed. This will look primarily at what improvisation will add to the program more than any other discipline. Finally, the researcher will cite references documenting techniques that were tried before by other instructors.

What is improvising? In his article, "On Musical Improvisation," Philip Alperson (1984, 17-29) outlined the answers to this question. Improvising is an art form in which one or more people spontaneously and simultaneously (1) compose, (2) interpret, and (3) perform a musical work. Professor William Harris has a very artful definition of improvisation in his article, "Improvisation the New Spirit in the Arts" (n.d., ¶ 2).

In imaginative philosophical terms, *Improvisation* might be metaphorically described as the act of stepping out of the fixed and fossilized world of the Past, standing for a moment on a tight-rope Wire representing the moment of the Present, while preparing to test the waters of the Future with an exploratory toe.

Yes, this is a mixed metaphor, but it is intentional and it is perhaps like much of life itself!

Why is improvisation included in the National Standards for Arts Education? The Music Educators National Conference (MENC) along with other organizations established a set of standards that they believe every American student should know and be able to execute. One of these standards is improvisation. On its web site, Arts Edge, the Kennedy Center offers these reasons for including the standard of improvisation in the National Standard for Arts Education (n.d.).

The period represented by grades 5-8 is especially critical in students' musical development. The music they perform or study often becomes an integral part of their personal musical repertoire. Composing and improvising provide students with unique insight into the form and structure of music and at the same time help them to develop their creativity. Broad experience with a variety of music is necessary if students are to make informed musical judgments. Similarly, this breadth of background enables them to begin to understand the connections and relationships between music and other disciplines. By understanding the cultural and historical forces that shape social attitudes and behaviors, students are better prepared to live and work in communities that are increasingly multicultural. The role that music will play in students' lives depends in large measure on the level of skills they achieve in creating, performing, and listening to music.

This time in students' lives can never be repeated. If educators want them to "be all they can be" in their musical ability, improvisation study (along with the other eight standards) must be implemented at this stage in their education. The New York State School Music Association takes the position that improvisation is included in the National Standard for Arts Education because, "No child's musical education is complete without experience in composition and improvisation. These two closely related areas are included in the national and state standards because they are the creative source of music itself." (n.d)

What can improvisation provide that no other musical discipline can?

Christopher D. Azzara, formerly an associate professor of music education in the Hartt School of Music, Dance, and Theatre at the University of Hartford in West Hartford, Connecticut, now at Eastman, attempts to answer this question (1999, 21-25).

Improvisation experience challenges students to develop higher-order music thinking skills. Students can benefit from meaningful creative performances and interactive, spontaneous musical conversations without the aid of notation. Improvisation is also an effective way for students to acquire the music-thinking skills necessary to perform from notation with greater understanding and to demonstrate their understanding of notated music by paraphrasing the music through improvisation.

The Gordon Institute for Musical Learning described the importance of improvisation as follows:

Musical improvisation is a uniquely fulfilling form of musical expression and an essential component of comprehensive music learning. To improvise is to demonstrate understanding of music in much the same way as the ability to rephrase a paragraph in one's own words is a measure of language comprehension. Musicians who improvise bring greater understanding through audition to the music they listen to, perform, read, and write. (2007, Improvisation section, ¶ 1)

Micah Volz (2005, 50-53) talks about the importance of creativity as it applies to improvisation in his article, "Improvisation Begins with Exploration."

Creativity is essential for exploratory improvisation. Students develop creative thinking through activities that guide them to find unusual uses, extend boundaries, reflect on their creation, and change their perspective.

Lastly, David Backer (1980, 42-51) feels there is another reason that improvisation must be included in music learning.

One of the most important reasons for using improvisation as a means of music learning is the total involvement necessary on the part of both teacher and student. Passivity is one of the greatest deterrents to learning on any level. Creating

situations in which a student is permitted and encouraged to experience and to use new information as he or she acquires it can only speed and enhance the learning process.

What are some strategies with which other music instructors have had success?

Benjamin Tomassetti (2003, 17-21) outlines a three-step approach in his article, "Beginning Blues Improvisation Pedagogy for the Non-jazz Specialist." Step one; students explore the two types of phrases - question (antecedent) and answer (consequent) - using the blues scale. Step two, students work on the melodic energy and dramatic shape of a solo. Step three, students use basic compositional techniques for thematic development.

Michael Bitz (1998, 21-24) believes that the first step toward improvisation is to choose a genre. He continues by saying that advanced jazz forms may not be the best choice for beginners because of its syncopation and its non-familiar harmonies as well as its fast tempos. This author offers some other options that would be more appropriate. They are bluegrass, blues, ska, reggae, rap, klezmer, and rock.

Robert Henry (1993, 33) developed a list of five components that he believes must be in every practice to develop successful improvisers. Those components are scales, patterns, theory, improvising, and listening.

METHOD BOOK REVIEW

In the experience of the writer as both a student and teacher, most first year band students spend a considerable amount of time working with a method book. These books provide the majority of instructional material required for the first year of band. Most contemporary methods provide instruction that covers the National Standards in the area of instrumental music education developed by the MENC. For this portion of the study,

this researcher intends to give an overview of how the popular method books include improvisation.

The first method book under discussion by this researcher is *Yamaha Advantage*, developed by Sandy Feldstein and Larry Clark. This researcher is currently utilizing this method book in her classroom. This method provides the student an opportunity to improvise and compose in the same exercise. This exercise provides the students with a pitch and some sample rhythms. The students are instructed to improvise rhythmically or to write in rhythms in order to compose original works. A second exercise on improvisation later in the book instructs students to use six notes and the rhythms provided to improvise or compose their own original works. Later in the method book, the same activity instructs the students to use the B flat scale without the pre-established rhythms.

The second book discussed is the *Do It* method developed by James O. Forseth. The *Do It* method first introduces a song to the students, for example "Down by the Station." This method then provides a brief history of the subject. The next lesson in the book provides some information on jazz and the link with improvisation. Next, the lesson provides a listening example on CD of a swing style version of the same song. The method provides an accompanying recording and instructs the students to play-by-ear in the same style, starting on concert B flat. The next part of the lesson includes a short description of improvisation and rhythmic improvisation. The final portion instructs the students to improvise a rhythmic variation of the song, "Down by the Station," with the same CD accompaniment. This lesson is repeated throughout the book, using various songs.

Accent on Achievement, by John O'Reilly and Mark Williams, is another popular method book that provides lessons on improvisation. The first exercise provides the students with one whole note per measure and instructs the students to improvise^A their own rhythms for each measure. The next improvisation opportunity is called free improvisation. This exercise provides the students with five notes and instructs the students to use these notes in any order with any rhythms, including the incorporation of rests.

Essential Elements, by Tim Lautzenheiser, John Higgins, Charles Menghini, Paul Lavender, Tom C. Rhodes, and Don Bierschenk, offers one opportunity for improvisation. This exercise is similar to the first improvisation lesson from *Accent on Achievement*. Again, this exercise provided students with whole notes and instruction to improvise their own rhythms to the given pitches. This is the only improvisation exercise included in this method book.

All of the previous method books discussed to this point follow the same structure. They are all designed to teach students to read and interpret increasingly difficult music throughout the book. Within this structure, they include special exercises dedicated to composition, improvisation, and ear training. The last method book under discussion is designed in a very different manner. The *Jump Right In* method, by Richard F. Grunow, Edwin Gordon, Christopher D. Azzara, and Michael E. Martin, uses a "sound before sight" approach. The creators of this method book believe that if the students know what sounds to expect before they play, they will become more musically proficient. This method incorporates singing through solfege as well as playing various patterns of notes to establish ideas like tonic and dominant functions in various keys. The

next step is to play different rhythmic exercises using these same patterns and notes. After a few of these exercises, the students are asked to use those same note patterns with their own rhythms to improvise an original work. This pattern is repeated throughout the book utilizing various rhythmic patterns and tonal functions. By taking a radical approach to the first-year band experience, this method offers more opportunities to improvise and allows the students greater outlets for their personal creativity.

TEACHING UNIT: HISTORY OF THE BLUES

The "Blues began in the late eighteen hundreds in the Mississippi Delta around the area of Clarksdale. It evolved from several different forms of music: field hollers, African Spirituals, work songs, ragtime songs, African chants, country reels, revivalist hymns, Anglo-Scottish ballads, and rural fife and drum music. Most of this original "Blues" music was lost to time but in the 1920s and 1930s recordings from Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Georgia, and the Carolinas have allowed the legacy of this early music to live on. Some of the performers who influenced the blues were born and raised in the delta including Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, Son House, John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, BB King, and Howlin' Wolf.

In the 1930s and 1940 many African Americans traveled up the Mississippi river to the major northern cities like Chicago and brought the "Blues with them. Upon arriving in the cities, the "Blues" took on various regional characteristics. LeRoi Jones described this transition in his book *Blues People* (Jones, 105).

Classic blues was entertainment and country blues, folklore. The blues and blues-oriented jazz of the new city dwellers was harder, crueler, and perhaps even more stoical and hopeless than the earlier forms. It took its life from the rawness and poverty of the grim adventure of "big city livin'." It was slicker, more sophisticated music, but the people too could fit these descriptions.

Over the years, the "Blues" moved around and changed a lot, influencing music and musicians along the way. Now many different forms of the "Blues" exists, for example, Jump blues, Boogie-woogie, Chicago blues, cool blues, West Coast blues, Texas blues, Memphis blues, St. Louis Blues, Kansas City blues, British blues, New Orleans blues, and Blues rock. In the end, Francis Davis described the life of the "blues" in his book, *The History of the Blues*, (1995, 57).

Those who write about the blues tend to grant it human characteristics. It's born in Mississippi before the turn of the century, it wanders around the south a little bit, spends a considerable amount of time in Texas, then turns up in Chicago just in time to father rock'n'roll. It dies a natural death around 1960, but stubborn old cuss that it is-rises up like Lazarus every ten years or so.

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to span several weeks in the second quarter of the first year of band. The unit is a series of mini-lessons (see Appendix B) that occupy the first ten to fifteen minutes of the band class, which meets three times a week.

This project actually began several weeks before the teaching unit through pre-teaching necessary skills. In order to familiarize the students with the notes of the blues scales, the teacher introduced the students to the scale pattern, in the form of "warm-ups"(see Appendix C) that the band played throughout the first part of the year. This enabled the educator to focus on the fingerings of these new notes in order not to divert the attention of the students from the area of focus of the study.

Lesson 1 of the study included a survey. (see Appendix D) This survey evaluated how the students felt about playing in the band. It also assessed how they felt about playing alone and what they thought about improvisation. This survey utilized the Likert Scale to rate student responses. A survey like this one on a different topic was given

previously to these band classes. Teacher observation indicated that students required sufficient time to think about all aspects of the questions to answer with any reliability.

Lesson 2 of the study included a pre-test (see Appendix E) to identify what the students already knew about improvisation. This short test was comprised of theory questions as well as some music history. The students were told that the test would not affect their grades so they would not be concerned about not knowing the information. The pre-test provided sufficient time for the students to think about the questions and produce a more accurate score.

Lesson 3 was actually the first instructional period and included a short lecture, a listening activity, and two journal questions. The lecture described improvisation and answered the questions: What is improvisation? Is improvisation just playing random notes? What kinds of music utilize improvisation? For the auditory activity, the class listened to twelve-bar-blues music by Count Basie and Duke Ellington. The class was asked to respond to two questions at the conclusion of the lesson: What did you think about the music? Does it sound like something you could learn to do? The journal entry had to be at least three complete sentences.

Lesson 4 was the first activity on rhythmic improvisation. The lesson began with call-and-response clapping. After the class established a steady beat with foot taps, the instructor clapped a four-beat rhythm using quarter notes and eighth notes. The class then clapped the same rhythm in response and the cycle was repeated a few times. At this point, individual students took over the teacher's call and the class then responded.

The second section of this lesson was designed to demonstrate phrases and phrase segments in a question-and-answer situation. First, the teacher selected a student

to clap a four-beat rhythmic question that the teacher responded to instead of copied. This activity was repeated but increased to eight beats. Students, in the last clapping activity in this lesson, created twelve measures of rhythmic improvisation. The teacher selected three groups of two students each. These three groups divided, with one student asking the eight-beat questions and the other answering back with eight beats. This took place one group at a time, thus creating twelve sequential measures. The last activity of this lesson was similar. Instead of clapping the rhythm, the students played the rhythm on the root notes of the chords in the twelve-bar-progression that the teacher provided on the board.

Lesson 5 was the second lesson of four that dealt with rhythmic improvisation. For this lesson, the teacher created a four-beat rhythm that the class repeated as an ostinato patted under the improvised rhythms. At that time, every student clapped an original rhythm moving consecutively down the row. Then the teacher increased the original rhythm to eight beats. The next section of the lesson on phrases was similar to Lesson 4 with two exceptions. First, instead of the band members keeping a steady beat, they patted the ostinato they had been clapping. Second, instead of clapping, they played the flattened third note of the blues pentatonic scale that fit the twelve-bar-blues progression. The teacher provided these notes on the board.

Lesson 6 was the third lesson on rhythmic improvisation and was very similar to the last two. Again, the teacher created an ostinato that the students clapped throughout the activity. The teacher selected a few students to create original rhythms over the ostinato. Like the last two, this lesson included a question-and-answer phrase section performed by groups in pairs. The teacher also reviewed the concept of question-and-

answer, reminding the students that they must be “talking” about the same thing. Then the class switched from clapping to playing. The notes from which the students chose were the fifth and flatted fifth of the blues pentatonic scale that corresponded with the twelve-bar-blues pattern.

Lesson 7 was the last lesson of rhythmic improvisation and began with the band patting a predetermined ostinato and the teacher selecting individuals to improvise clapped, four-beat rhythms over the ostinato. The teacher then increased the improvised rhythm to eight beats in length. The design of the phrase section of the lesson was just like the previous lesson but the note choices were the fifth and the flatted third note of the progression. This lesson concluded with a journaling activity where the students were asked to comment on the activities with regards to their perceived degree of enjoyment and success.¹

Lesson 8 in the unit was a lecture on the history of the twelve-bar-blues form. The teacher discussed what “The Blues” were about, who wrote the form, as well as a brief time line of “The Blues.” The teacher diagrammed on the board the 12-bar-blues pattern with the use of Roman numerals. The listening example was “One O’clock Jump,” by Count Basie. The lesson concluded with a journaling activity. The students were asked to state their opinions about the music as well as indicate whether the form was familiar to them.

Lesson 9 of the unit was on pattern recognition and began with a review of the 12-bar-blues pattern written on the board. The teacher provided the students with Roman numeral cards that indicated the Tonic I, the Subdominant IV, and the Dominant V

¹ The rhythmic improvisation of lessons 4, 5, 6, and 7 were created by Dr. David Snyder of Illinois State University and were included in an article he wrote for the *Jazz Educator Journal*, November of 2003. This researcher obtained permission to use his ideas for this unit (see Appendix F).

chords (see Appendix G). The teacher directed the students to hold up the corresponding card as she led them through the pattern. The class kept the beat by tapping their feet. Repeating this activity several times allowed many students to lead the class.

Lesson 10 continued with the 12-bar-blues pattern. The first activity was a review of the student-led activity of the last lesson. The class listened to a recording of a jazz combo playing the chord changes of the twelve-bar-blues pattern. She then played the recording again, holding up the Roman numeral chord card in time with the music. The third time through the recording, the students followed the teacher's actions by holding up their cards in time with the music. The teacher repeated this activity giving each student who wished, a chance to lead the class.

Lesson 11 in the unit was devoted to the blues scale. The teacher first diagrammed the major scale on the board to show the half-step/whole-step patterns. She then played that scale and a few different ones on her flute to demonstrate the sound of a major scale. Next, the teacher then altered the scale on the board to become a blues pentatonic scale illustrating the different pattern. She played that scale and blues pentatonic scales in other keys to demonstrate the unique sound. The class received scale sheets that covered the three blues pentatonic scales needed to improvise the twelve-bar-blues. The students played through the first scale in class and were assigned to play the two remaining scales for homework. The lesson concluded with a journaling activity that asked the students to describe how the different types of scales sounded to them.

In Lesson 12, the teacher asked the students to improvise solo phrases using two notes per chord. The class created a four-beat rhythm and the teacher wrote it on the board. The teacher asked three volunteers to improvise a four-measure phrase of the

twelve-bar-blues pattern. Band students held up their chord cards to help each soloist remember the changes. The soloists improvised their phrases using two notes: the first and the flatted-seventh notes of the blues scale, along with the rhythm from the board. The blues jazz combo CD accompanied the soloist.

Lesson 13 was very similar to Lesson 12. Again, the class created a four-beat rhythm for the board. The teacher introduced and demonstrated the difference between “straight” and “swung” eighth notes. She asked three volunteers to improvise the three phrases for the twelve-bar-blues using the swung eighth notes and the rhythm on the board as well as the first note of the blues pentatonic scale. The CD accompanied the volunteers. The band assisted by holding up their chord cards.

In Lesson 14, student volunteers improvised for twelve measures, using their own rhythms and two notes chosen from the blues pentatonic scale. The class developed two four-beat rhythms. Then, they played those rhythms on the first and flatted third notes of the pentatonic scale several times to establish possible riffs. As the volunteers improvised their solos using the same notes, the class assisted with chord cards. The blues CD accompanied this activity.

The next lesson, Lesson 15, was an extension of the last lesson. Again, members of the class created two rhythms that they practiced on the first, flatted third, and fifth notes of the blues pentatonic scale, establishing “riffs.” The teacher felt they needed to stop using the swung eighth notes because of problems playing even eighth notes in their concert music. The teacher asked volunteers to improvise one of the three phrases of the twelve-bar-blues using the three pre-selected notes. The class assisted again with the chord cards as the CD accompanied the improvisers.

In Lesson 16, the band traded off blues solos. In this lesson, volunteers had to select one of the three phrases of the twelve-bar-blues. The teacher introduced a possible phrasing-technique pattern. In this pattern, the second soloist responded to the first improviser's solo, and the third soloist played something different. The soloists had to select their note from three choices: the first, flatted third, and fifth notes of the blues pentatonic scale. Again, the band assisted with their chord cards and the CD accompanied. The lesson culminated with a journaling activity where the students were asked if they enjoyed improvising their portions of the solo and why.

In Lesson 17, each band student improvised an entire twelve-measure solo alone. Before this, the teacher told the class about possible note combinations that went well together, (for example, the first and flatted seventh notes and the fourth and fifth notes of the blues pentatonic scale.) The teacher demonstrated alternating between these types of note combinations when she improvised a solo for the class. The teacher handed out a short original composition of the twelve-bar-blues (see Appendix H) so the class could accompany the soloist. After several students improvised solos, the class "journalled" about whether they felt comfortable participating in this activity and what aspects of the activity, if any, they enjoyed.

Lesson 18 was the culminating improvisation day. The teacher had intended to set the stage up as if for a performance but the auditorium portion of the classroom was being used for another activity. The solos were video-recorded, instead. One other alteration to the lesson was the use of the CD. The teacher intended to have the band accompany the solos but it proved to be too difficult. The band could play the music but putting it together with the solo proved problematic because the soloist kept losing their

place and failed to come in at the correct time. In the end, all of the students improvised either an entire twelve-measure solo or a phrase of the twelve-bar-blues. Solos were graded by a pre-established rubric (Appendix I). The students completed the lesson by journaling their feelings about performing in front of a camera and creating their own solos.

Lesson 19 was a post-test (see Appendix E) assessing what the students knew about improvisation at the end of the unit. This test was the same as the pre-test and the students were given the same amount of time to complete the test.

Lesson 20, the last lesson in the unit, was a concluding survey (see Appendix J) to assess what the student thought about playing. The first ten questions were the same as the initial survey. In addition, there were five extra questions about the students' feelings about improvisation now that they had completed the unit.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher selected four different mediums for data collection: a written test, a survey, a performance rubric, and a written journal. Two different sixth grade classes took part in this study and completed each data-collection instrument.

The written test took the forms of a pre- and post-test. Fifteen students from Deep Branch Elementary School's Sixth Grade Band participated in the study. The average score on the pre-test was (30%). The average score on the post-test was (50%). This showed an average increase of twenty percent over the course of the unit. Three students from this class showed an increase of (40%) between the pre- and post-test while only one student's grade dropped (10%) in that same time. Seventeen students from Oxendine Elementary School's Sixth Grade Band participated in the study. The average score on

the pre-test was (42%). The average score on the post-test was (55%). This showed an average increase of (13%) over the course of this unit. One student in this class showed an increase of (50%) between the pre- and post-test while one student's grade dropped (40%) in the same time.

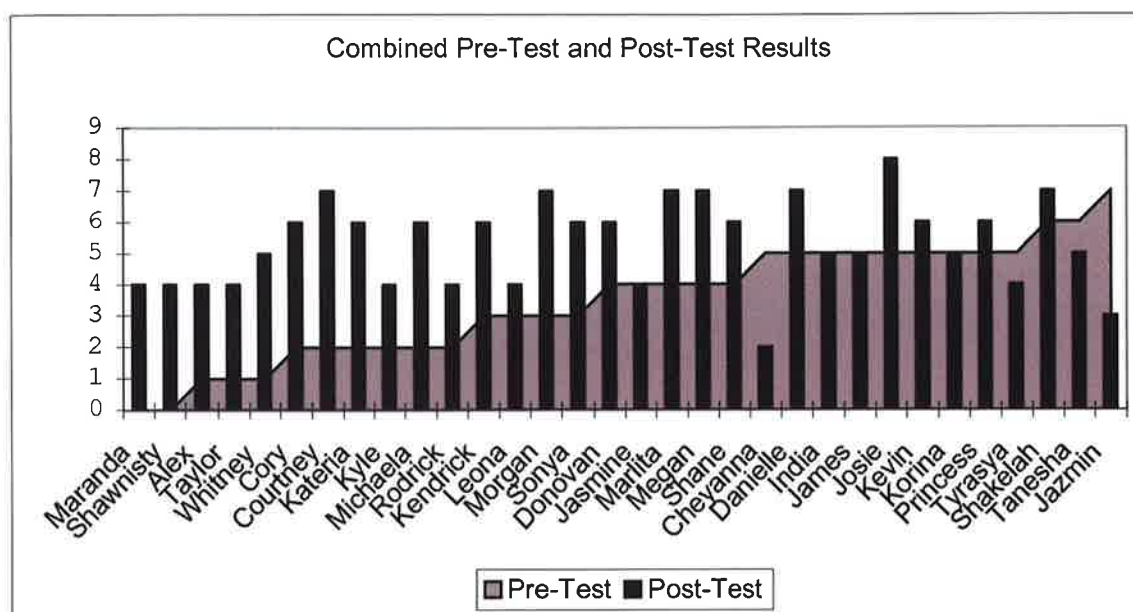


Figure 1. This chart compares the improvisation unit's pre- and post-test scores for both Oxendine and Deep Branch band students.

Twenty-four of the 32 students' grades improved from the pre-test to the post-test. The researcher designed the pre-test and the post-test to determine subject mastery. This demonstrated that the students in general increased their knowledge of the subject over the course of the unit and that the unit was the cause of the material mastery. Two students from one school, however, showed drastic decreases in their post-test scores. Upon talking to these two students, the researcher believes that these students were distracted because of a school function on the day of testing. All other mediums used for data collection showed that these students understood the material. For these reasons, the

researcher believes that the pre-test and post-test were reliable assessment devices and that the students were successful in gaining the knowledge and skill required by this unit.

The second data-collection medium utilized by the researcher to collect data was an initial and concluding survey. This survey was used to assess what the students believed about their abilities in respect to the unit. The survey consisted of ten to fifteen questions on a variety of aspects of instrumental music and improvisation.

Survey Question 1

I enjoy playing my instrument with the band.

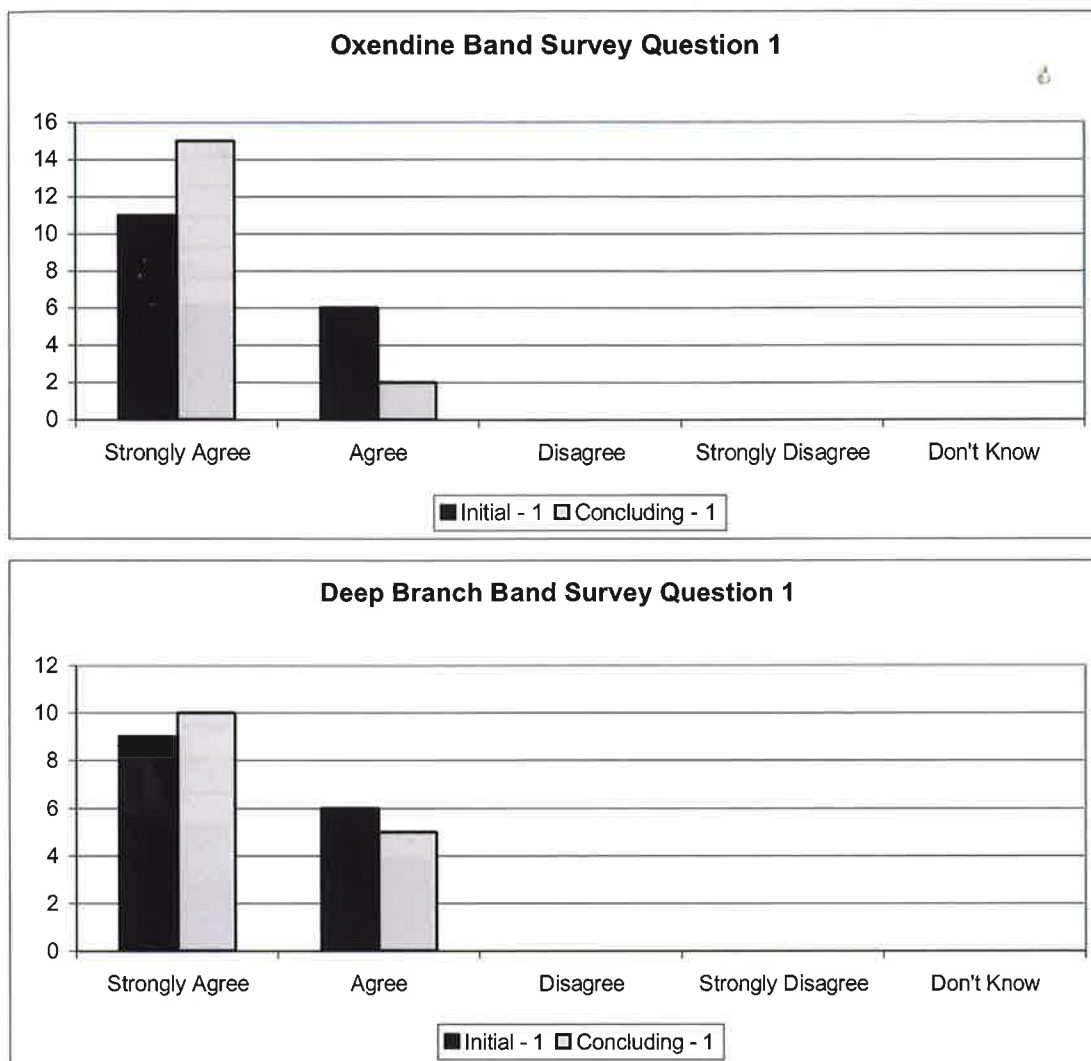


Figure 2. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 1 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The first question asked the student about the degree of their enjoyment of playing their instrument with the band. Over the course of this study, the students reported that their enjoyment increased.

Survey Question 2

I enjoy playing my instrument by myself.

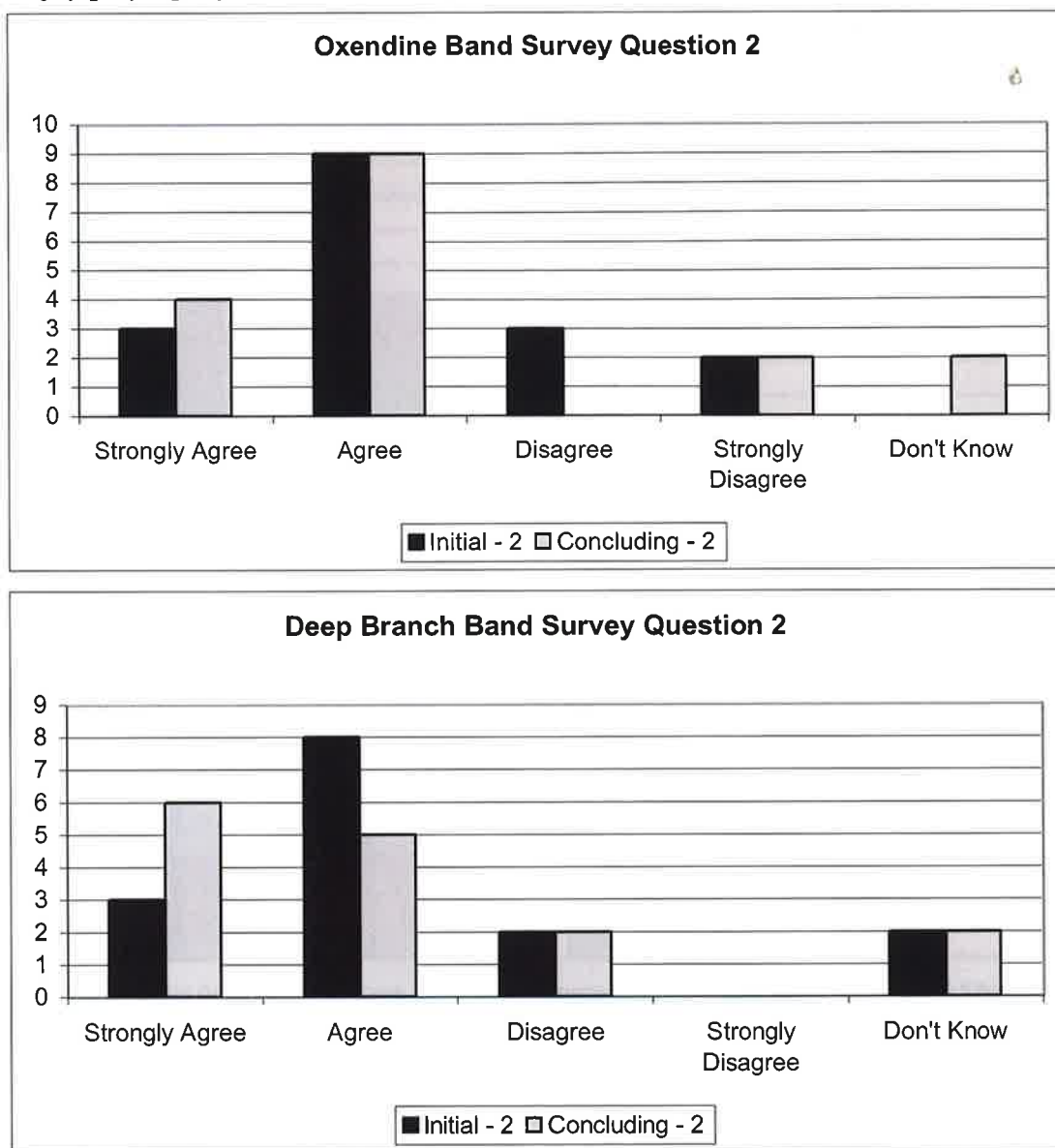


Figure 3. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 2 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The second question showed that, 23 students enjoyed playing their instruments alone at the beginning of the unit with one more at the end of the study. The amount of students who found solo work less enjoyable in the initial survey decreased by three in the concluding survey.

Survey Question 3

I joined band so I could learn to read music.

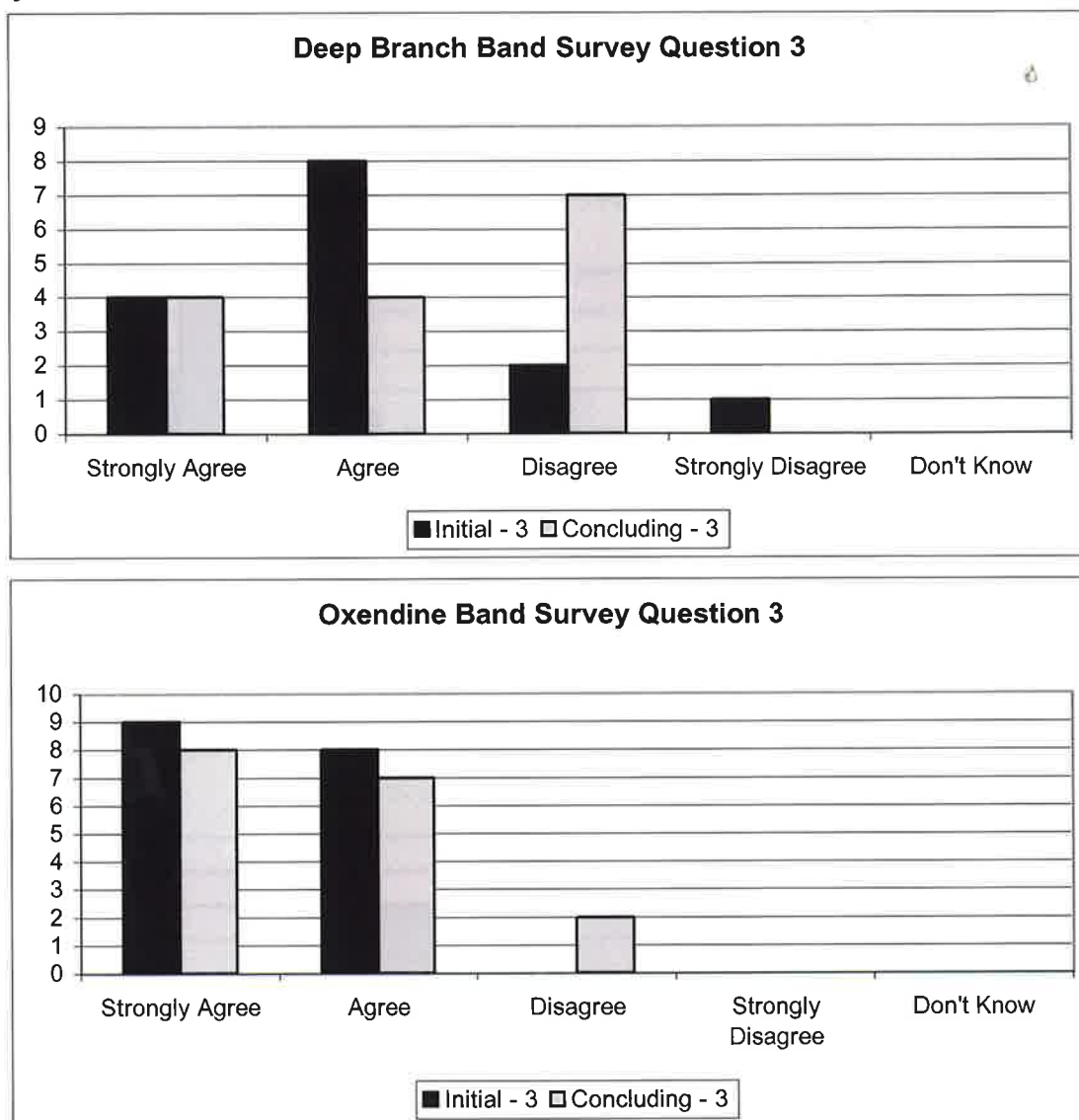


Figure 4. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 3 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The third question asked if the students started band with the express purpose of learning to read music. Before the unit, 29 students responded that they did join band to learn to read music. Over the course of the unit, six of these students changed their mind and decided that they did not join band to learn to read music. This was a greater trend at

Deep Branch Elementary than Oxendine Elementary with five students compared to two students.

Survey Question 4

I joined band so I could play music in an ensemble.

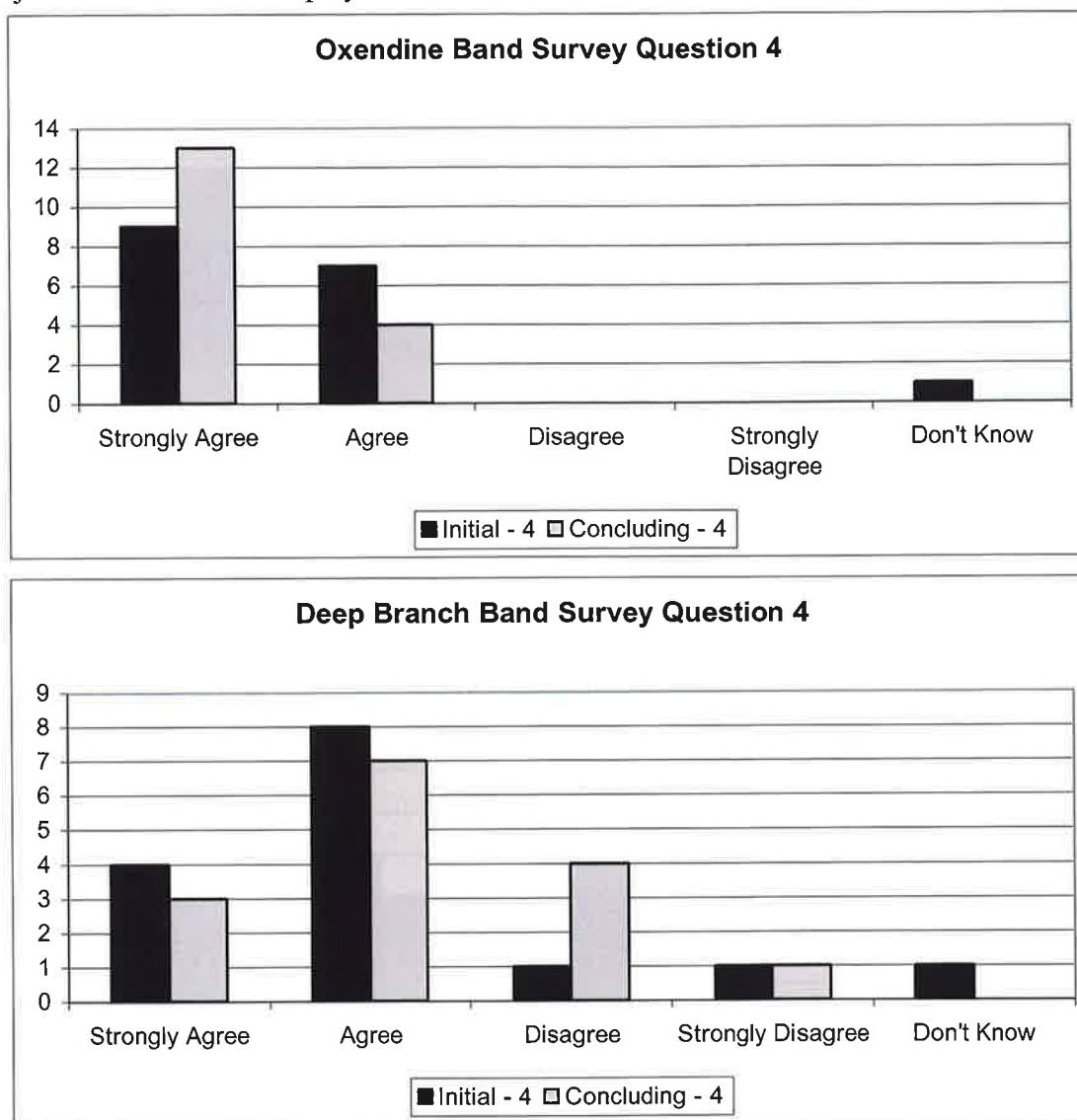


Figure 5. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 4 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The fourth question asked the students if they joined band so they could play in an ensemble. Students in each band in both surveys overwhelmingly decided that they did join the band to play in an ensemble by (84%). There was, however, a small group

of students, from Deep Branch Elementary, whose responses changed upon completing the unit. Three students decided that they had not joined to play in an ensemble after all.

Survey Question 5

I joined band so I could create music.

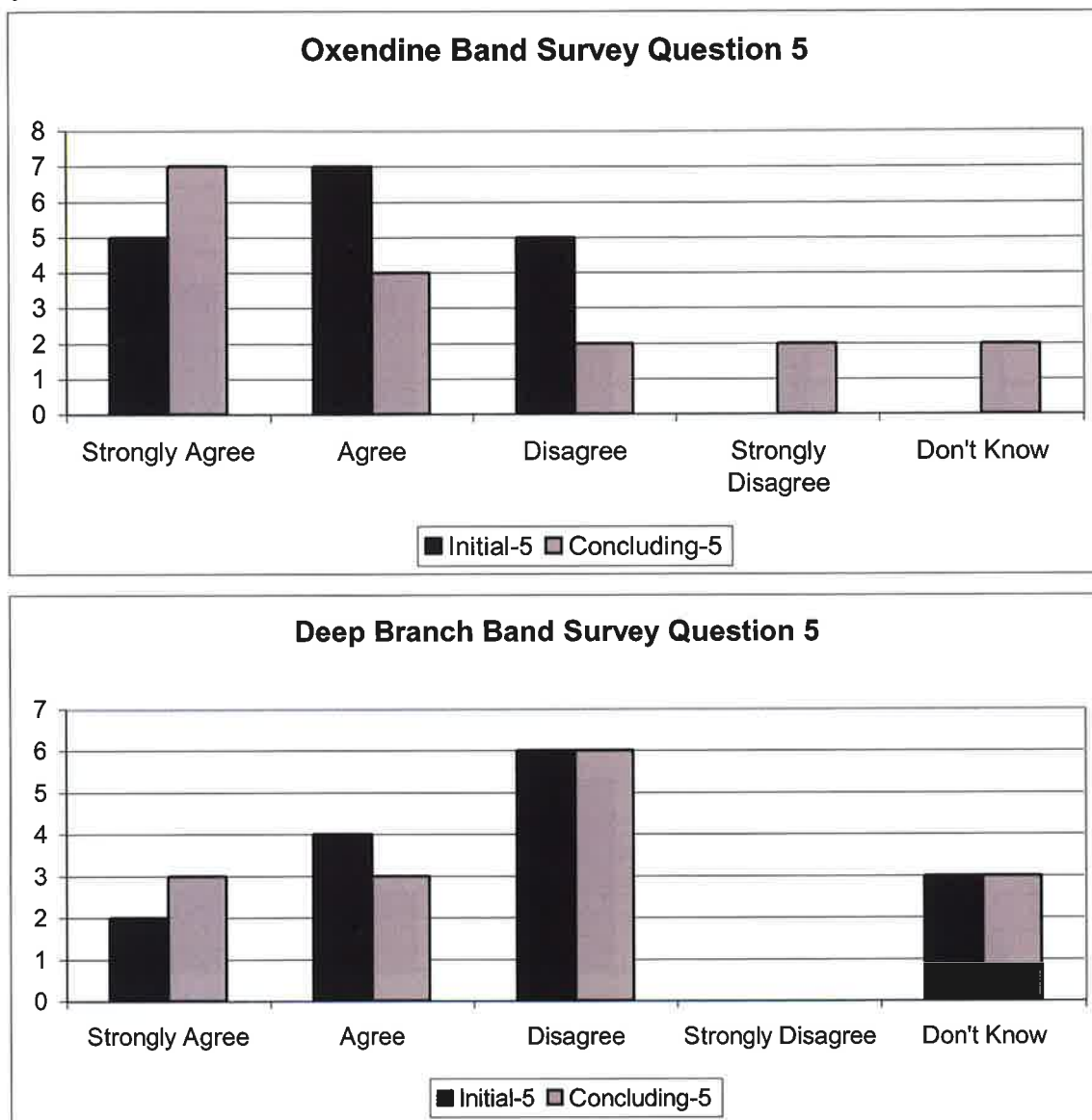


Figure 6. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 5 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

Students in the two bands were of a split opinion about the fifth question about whether or not they joined the band to create music. At the beginning of the study, the responses were wide ranging: 18 agreed or strongly agreed, 11 disagreed, and three were

undecided. In the end, more students from Oxendine believed that they did join band to learn to create music.

Survey Question 6

I joined band so I could play my instrument by myself.

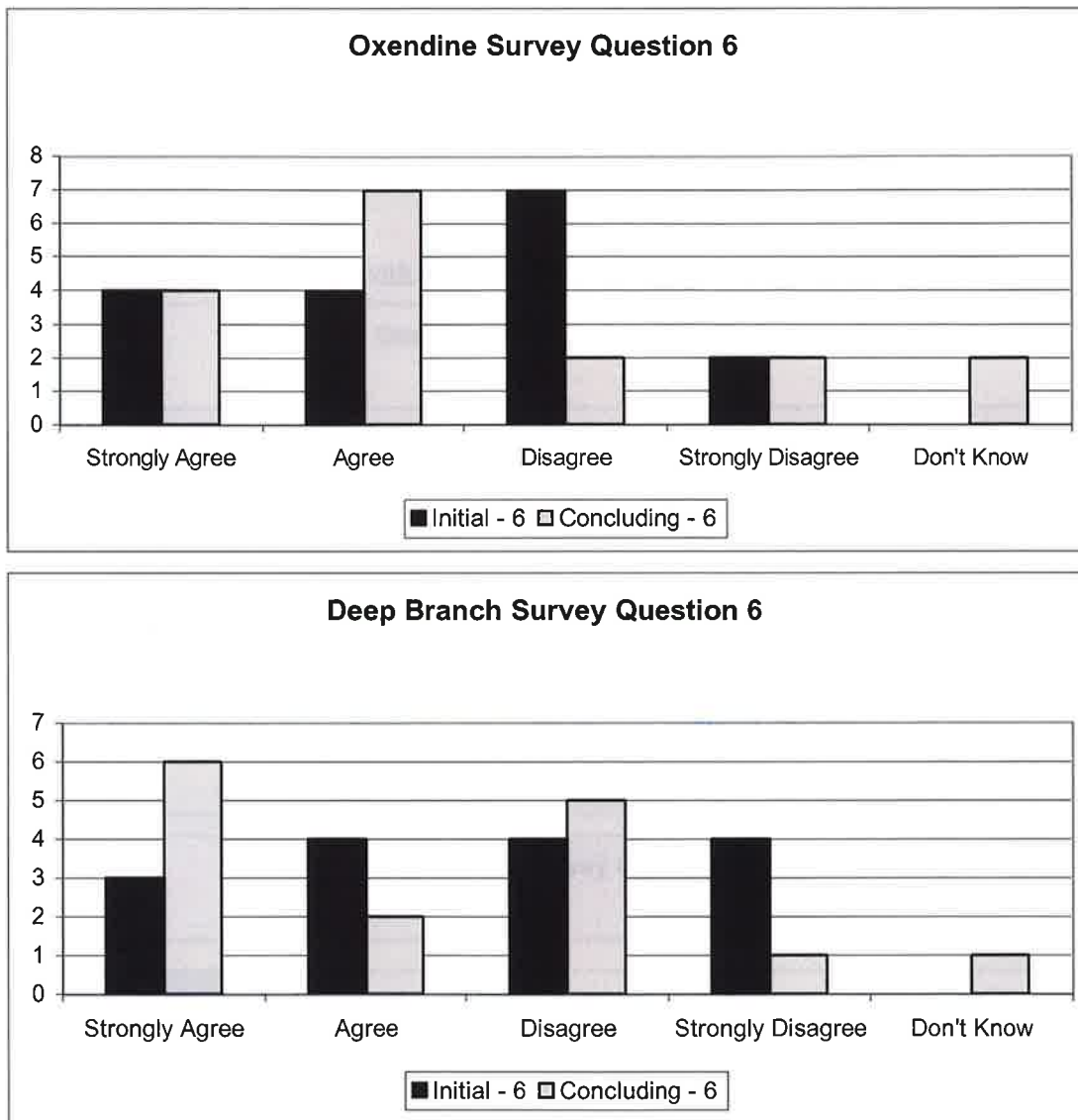


Figure 7. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 6 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The sixth question of the survey asked the students if they joined band so that they could play their music by themselves. Again, student from each of the schools were divided on their decision. A large segment of Oxendine's band, nine students, at first did

not believe they had joined the band to play solo work but at the completion of the unit five students had changed their mind and agreed with the statement. Deep Branch's band was split in its decision as well at the start, with seven students agreeing with the statement and eight students disagreeing. Upon completing the unit the responses were still divided with eight students agreeing and seven students disagreeing with the survey statement.

Survey Question 7

When I play my instrument with the band, I feel confident.

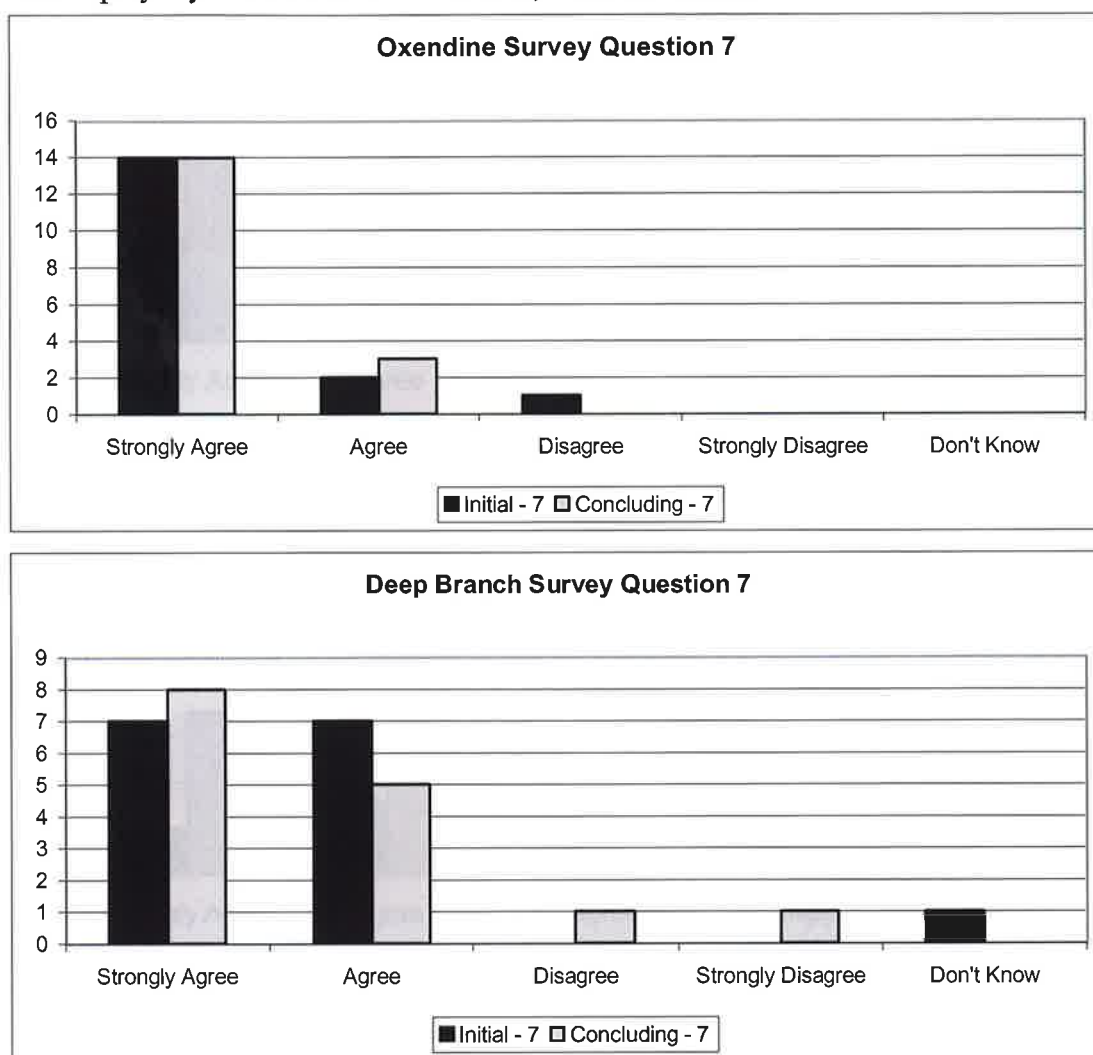


Figure 8. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 7 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The seventh question of the survey asked the students if they felt confident when they played with the band. To this question, students at Oxendine Elementary answered affirmatively at both the start and completion of the unit. While 13 of Deep Branch Elementary band students agree with this statement, two students changed their minds and said that they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Survey Question 8

Now that I know how to improvise music, I feel confident when I play my instrument with the band.

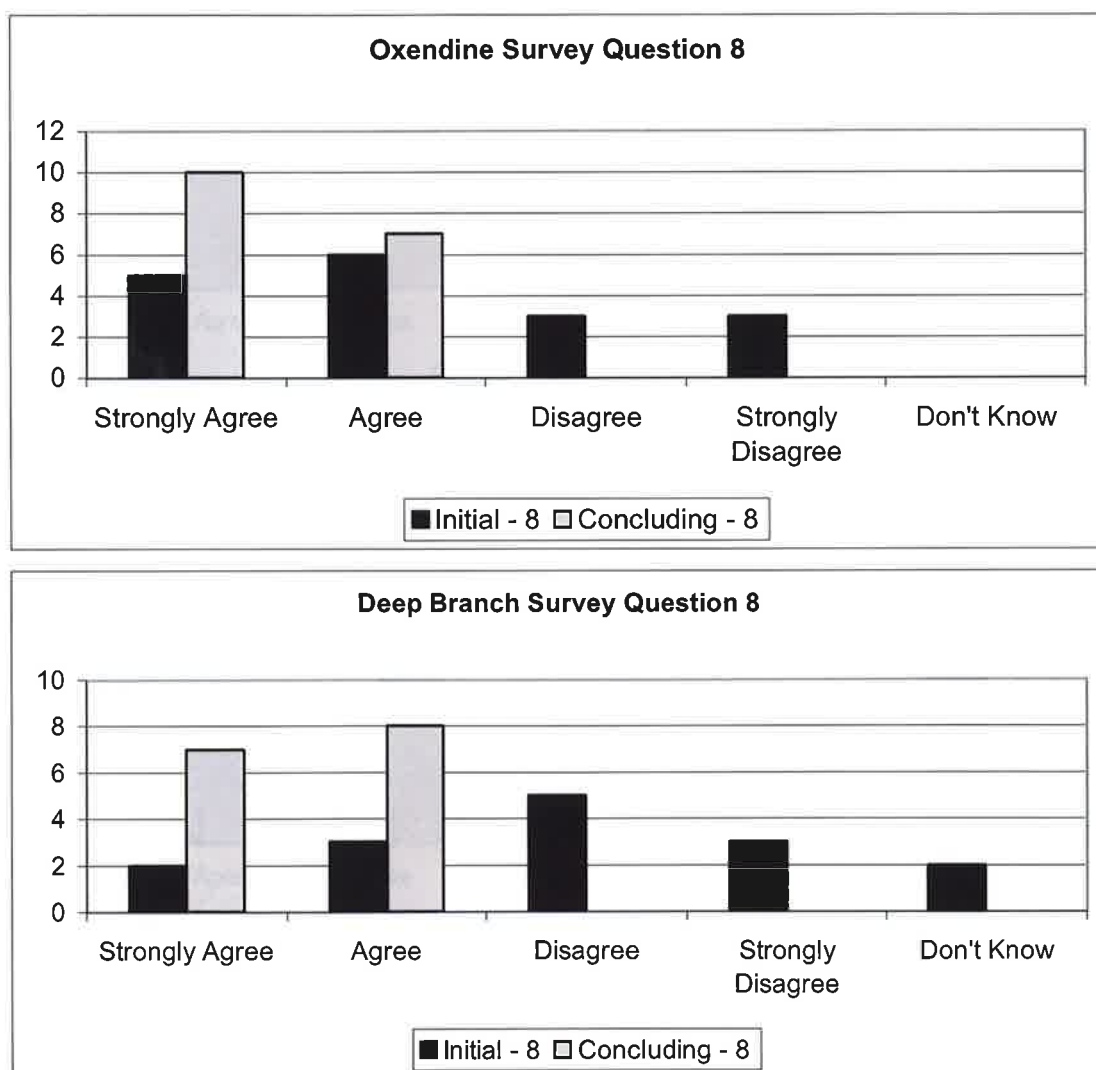


Figure 9. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 8 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

Both bands, upon completion of the unit, agreed with the eighth question.

Students indicated, now that they knew how to improvise, they feel confident when they played with the band.

Survey Question 9

Now that I know how to improvise music, I feel confident when I play my instrument by myself in front of the band.

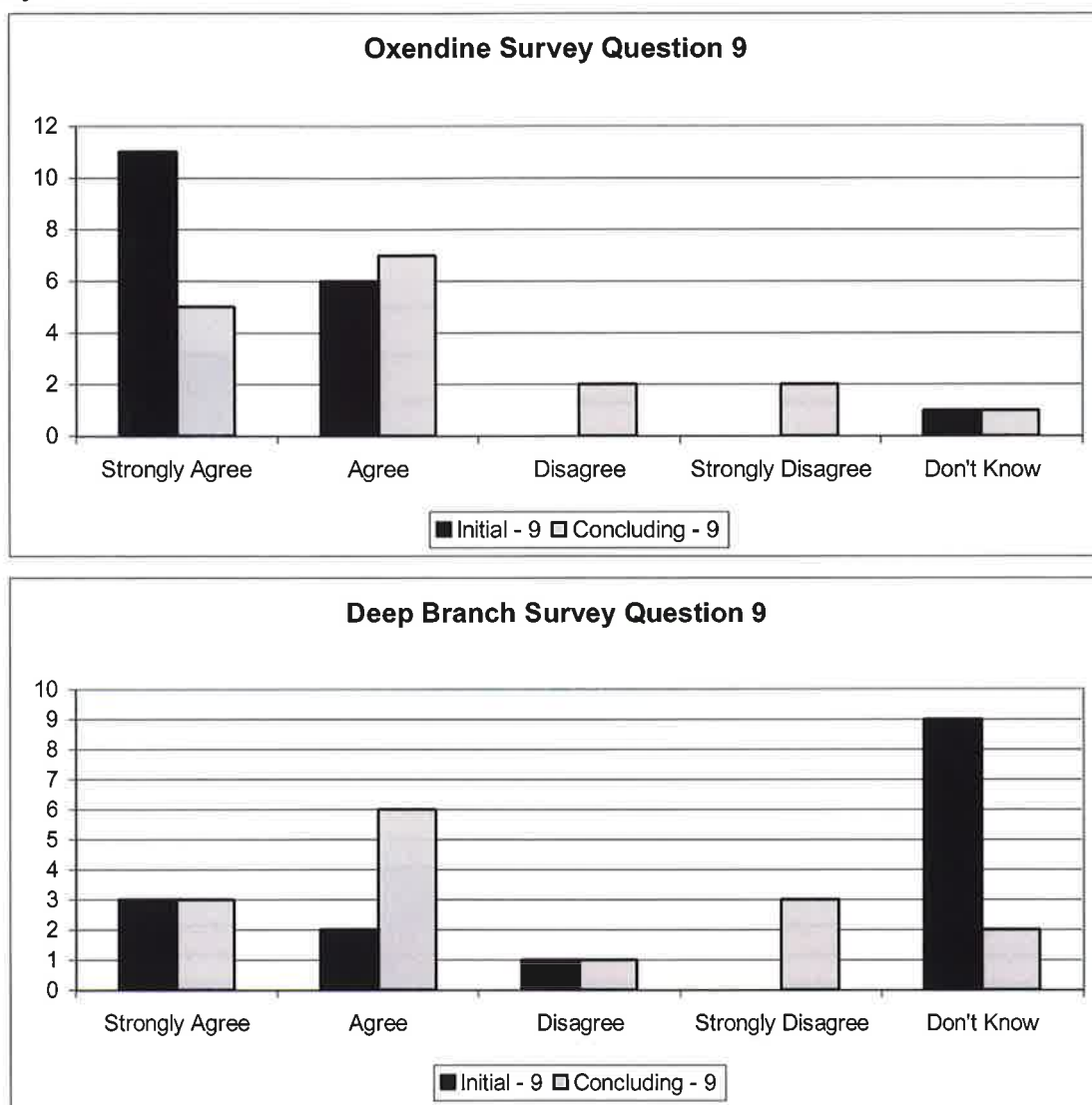


Figure 10. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 9 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

Question nine asked the band students if they felt more confident in their solo playing in front of the band now that they knew how to improvise. At the end of the unit,

four students from the Deep Branch Elementary Band felt much more confident.

Oxendine Elementary students were much more divided on this question. Before the unit, all 17 students felt that knowing how to improvise would make them feel more confident. After the unit, 12 students still agreed with the statement, but two students did not feel so sure and a two of them felt very unconfident soloing in front of the band even with their improvisational knowledge.

Survey Question 10

I can read music well.

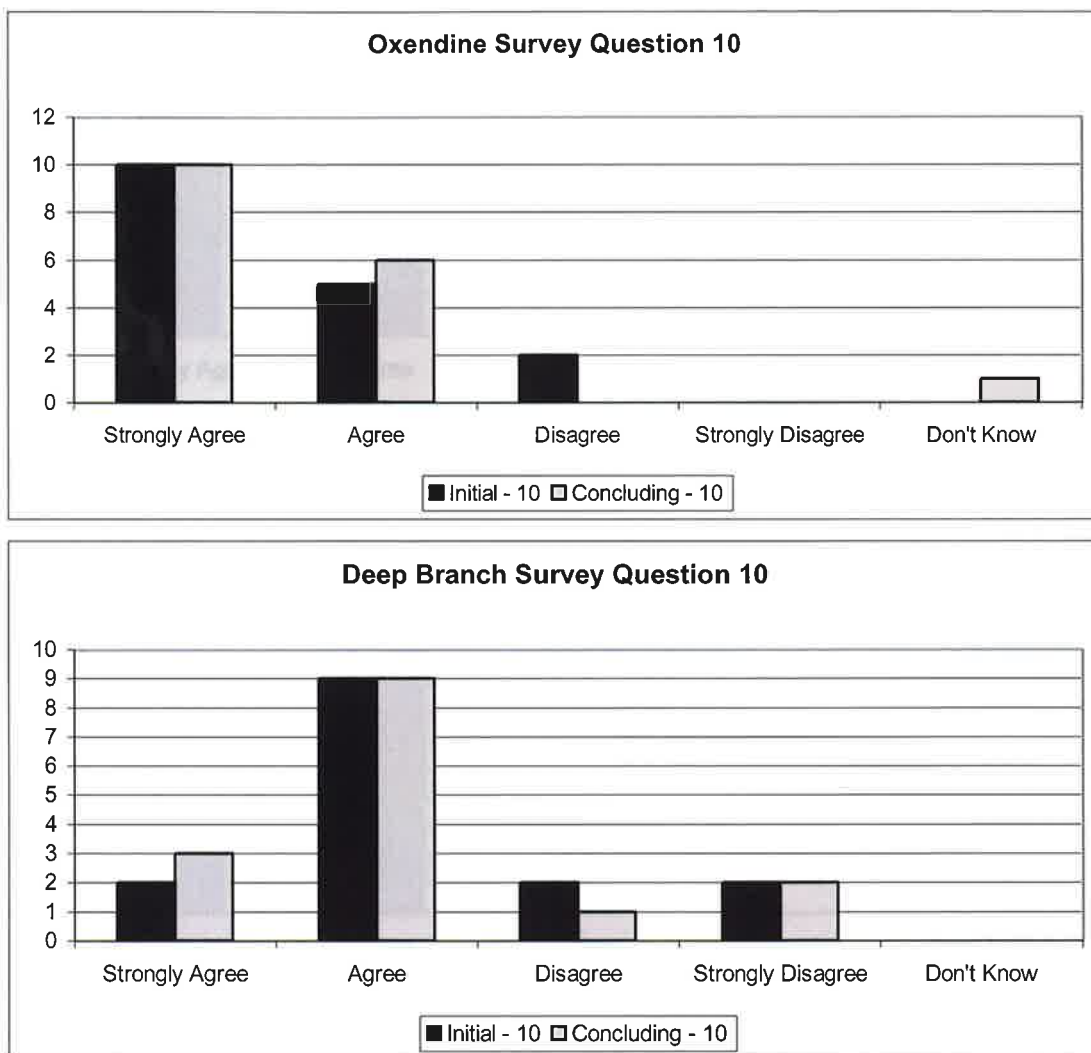


Figure 11. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 10 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The tenth question asked the band students if they could read music well. All but one student at Oxendine finished the unit reporting they could indeed read music well. Twelve of the students at Oxendine finished the unit reporting they could indeed read music well. Twelve of the students at Deep Branch Elementary believed that they could read music well when they finished the unit. In this class, however, four students started the unit believing they could not read music and three completed the unit with the same opinion.

Survey Question 11

I enjoy learning to improvise.

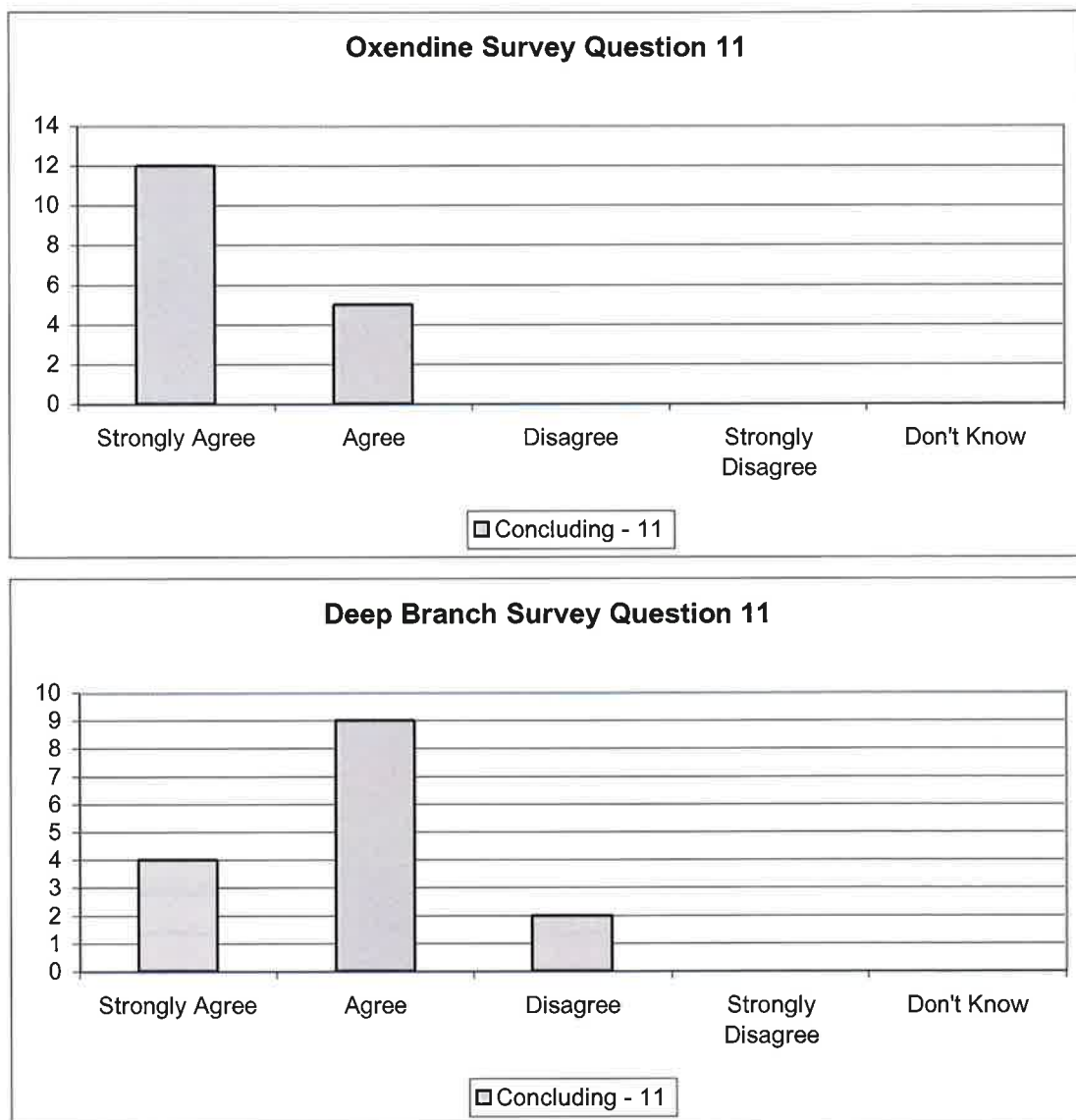


Figure 12. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 11 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The last five questions of the survey were only asked in the concluding survey.

Question 11 asked if the students enjoyed learning how to improvise. All of the Oxendine students agreed that they did enjoy learning how to improvise. All but two of the Deep Branch students also enjoyed learning how to improvise. The two students however, reported they did not enjoy the unit.

Survey Question 12

I can improvise music in my band class.

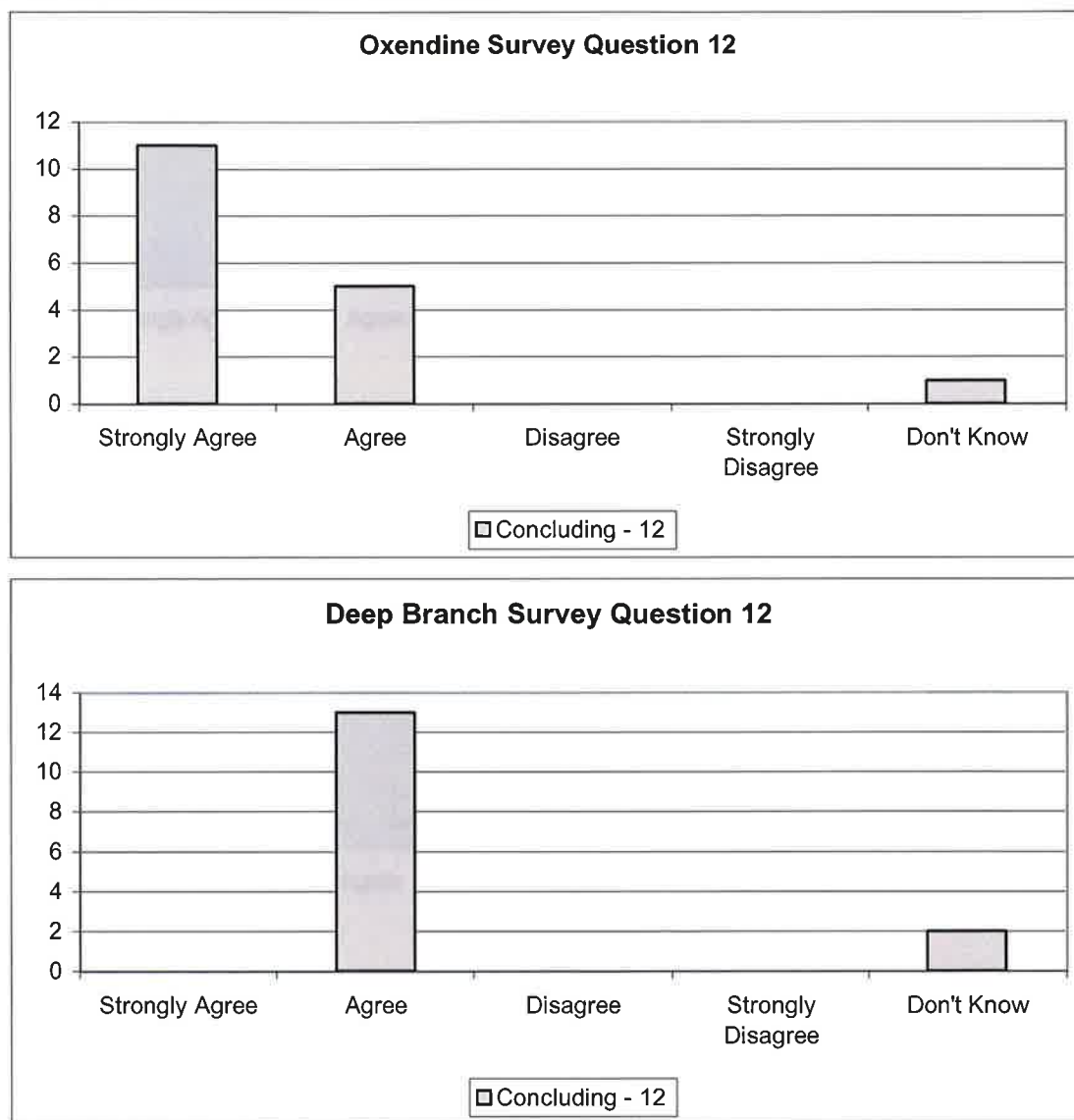


Figure 13. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 12 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

Question 12 asked if the students believed they could improvise. Between both classes, all but three students believed they could improvise music upon completion on the unit. The three remaining students were unsure if they had mastered the skill.

Survey Question 13

I enjoy improvising music in my band class.

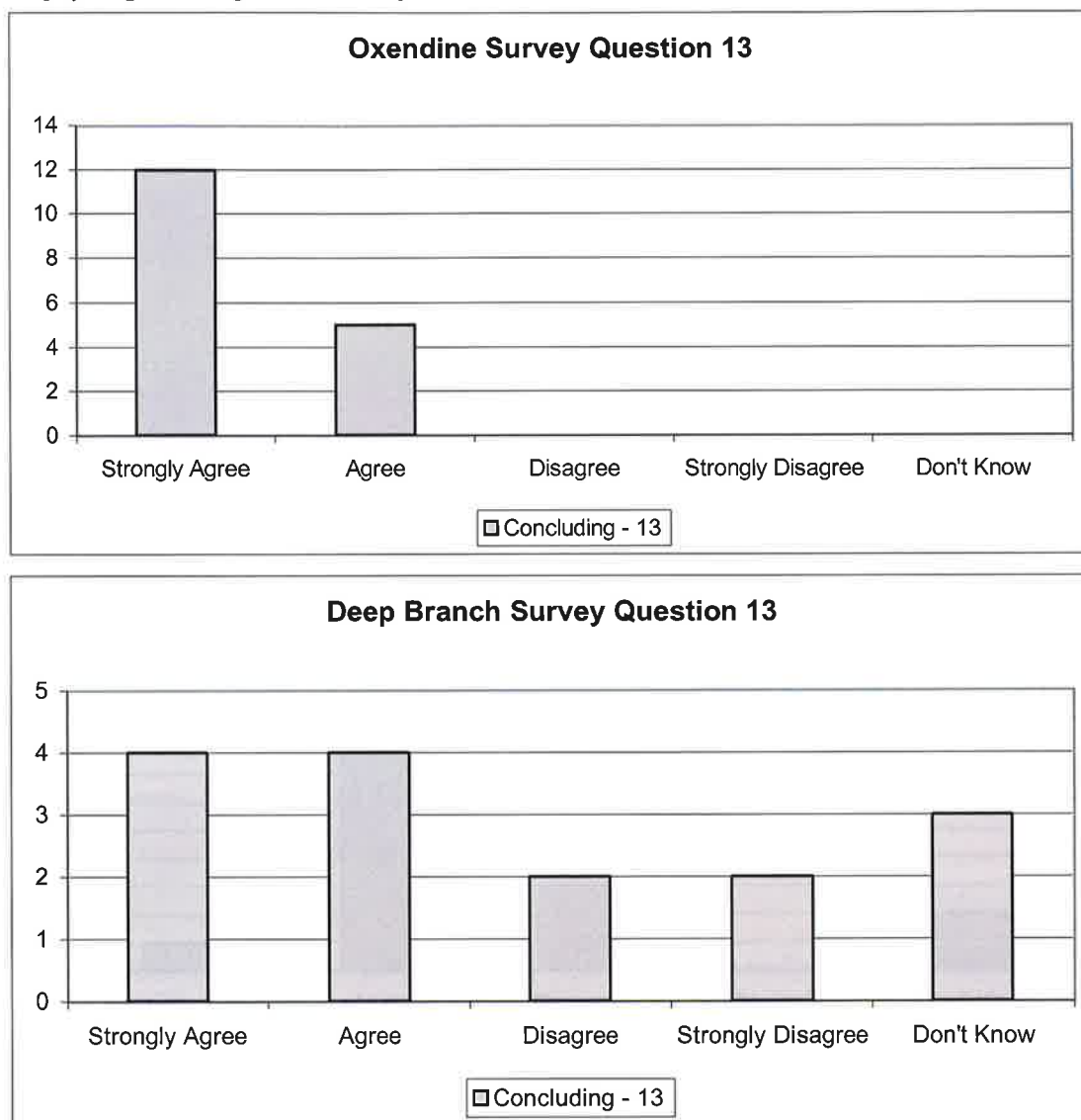


Figure 14. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 13 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

Question 13 asked if the students enjoyed improvising in their band class. All of the Oxendine students answered affirmatively. At Deep Branch Elementary, the answers

were much more varied. Eight of the 15 students did enjoy improvising but four students did not enjoy the unit. Three students were unsure about their feelings regarding their enjoyment of improvisation.

Survey Question 14

I know more about music now that I am able to improvise music.

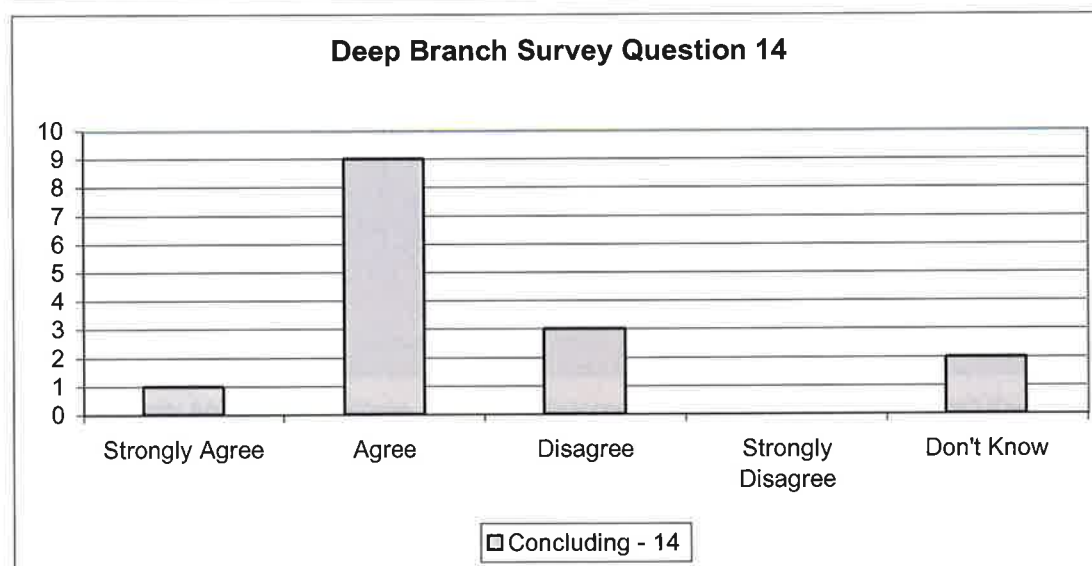
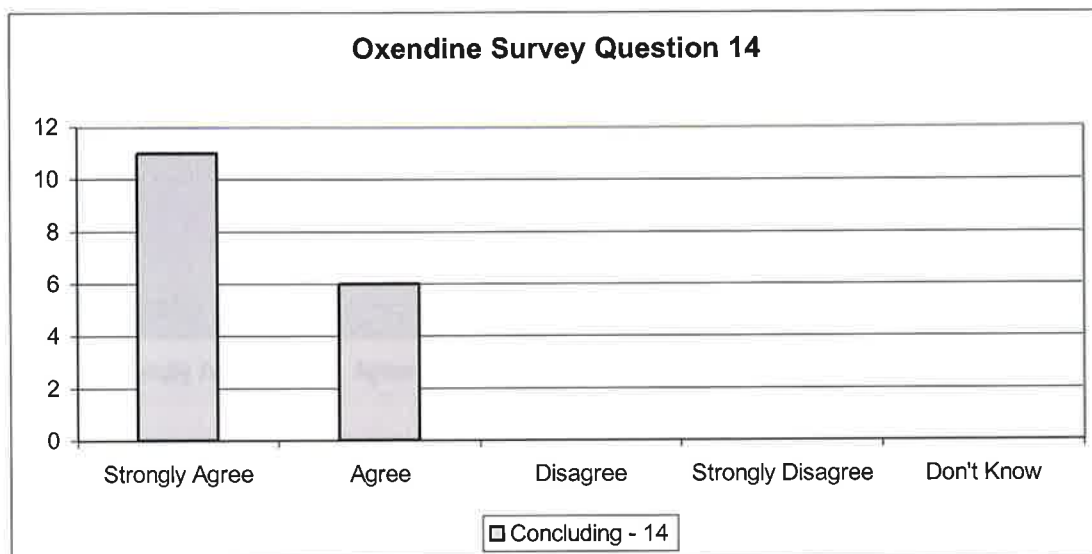


Figure 15. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 14 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

Question 14 asked if the students believed they knew more now that they could improvise. Again, the entire Oxendine band believed they did indeed know more about

music now that they could improvise. Most of the Deep Branch students answered affirmatively. Three however answered negatively and one was unsure.

Survey Question 15

I am a better musician now that I know how to improvise music.

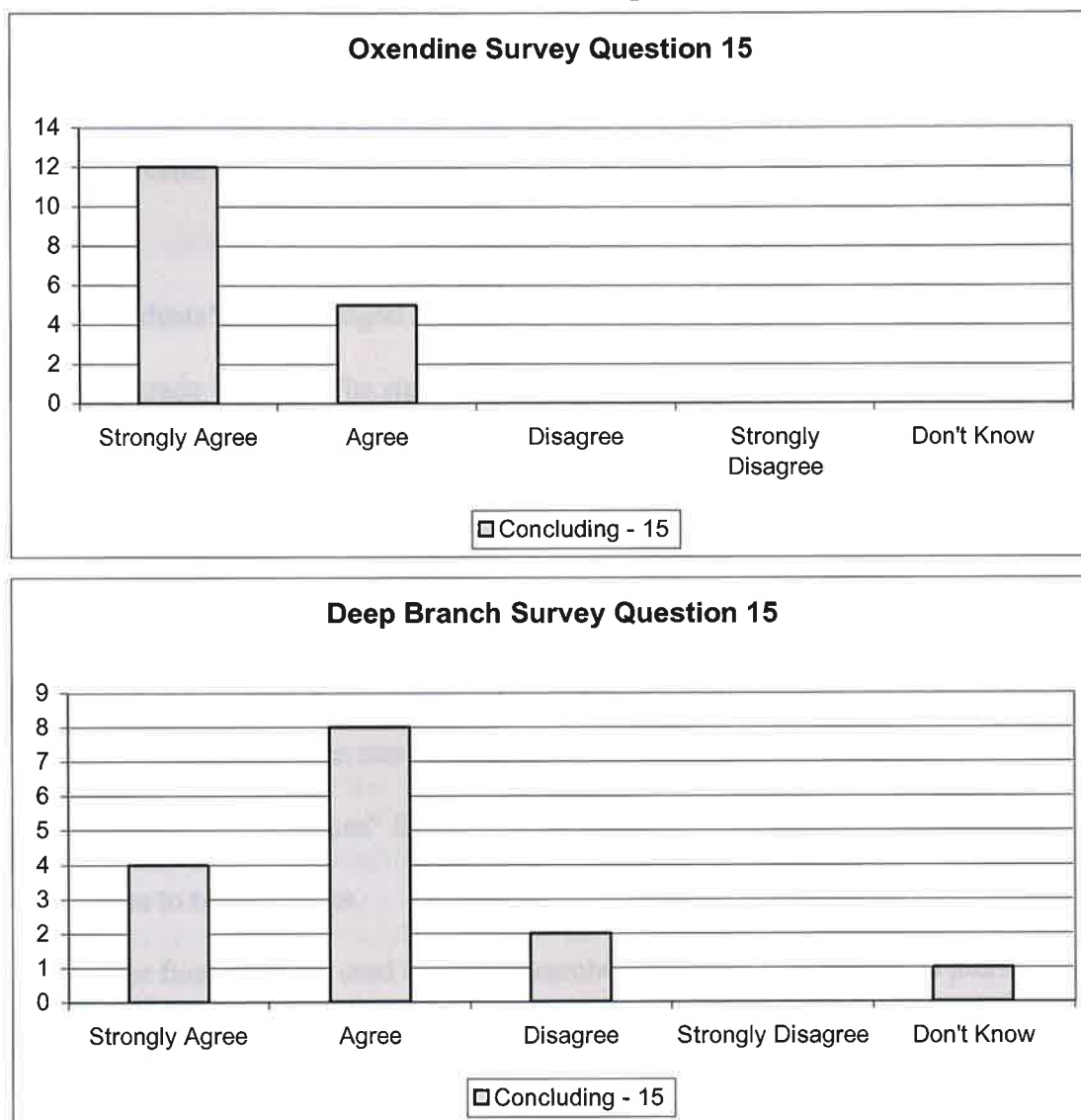


Figure 16. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 15 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.

The final question asked if the students believed they were better musicians now that they knew how to improvise. One more time, the entire Oxendine band answered

affirmatively. The majority of the Deep Branch students answered affirmatively as well. Two however answered negatively and one was unsure.

A third source of data collected during the unit was based on a recorded and graded improvisational solo. The improvised solo was graded with a predetermined rubric. The grading rubric was worth twenty points and included aspects like proper note use, appropriate rhythms, posture, volume, tone quality, technique, tonguing, and "Blues" structure.

Students' grades ranged between 10 and 18 points. The most frequently-occurring grade was 15. The students used correct note choices for each chord change (92%) of the time. Students had difficulty in using the correct "Blues" form, as well as using more than one note per measure. The most common occurrence (76%) was the students' usage of the same rhythm repeatedly from one solo to another. Students from Deep Branch Elementary earned the top two grades: 18 and 17. These two students attempted to use more than one note per measure, to vary their rhythm, and to use the corrected form of the "Blues" form. This demonstrated the Deep Branch students' willingness to take chances.

The final medium used by this researcher to collect data was class journaling regarding several different aspects of the unit. The researcher then assessed the students feelings about making up their own solos as well as being recorded in the final lesson. In Lesson 16, the students were asked if they enjoyed improvising a portion of the blues solo and why. One student responded with the following:

Yes, even though I did mess up the first time around. But the second time around I did pretty good even though I did squeak. But other than that I felt and did pretty good.

In Lesson 17, the students "journalled" about what they liked best about improvising their own solo. They were also asked "whether, why and why not" they felt comfortable with this type of performing. The researcher found the following response interesting:

What I liked best about the solo is that you got to play by yourself and felt like a owner. I don't feel comfortable playing this because it is very hard and not so interesting.

In Lesson 18, the students "journalled" about what it felt like to perform in front of a camera. They were asked whether they enjoyed creating their own solo. The researcher found the following responses insightful:

I liked it (performing in front of a camera) because I like to do my own thing.
I do (enjoy creating my own solo) because I want people to hear me.

I love playing in front of a camera it was awesome because I felt like an eagle soaring for the first time in front of people. Yes, I enjoyed making my own solo it rocked.

Some of the students did express negative feelings about the improvisation unit. The sixty-eight percent of the students expressing negative feelings cited fear of failure and difficulty with the processes of improvisation. For the most part, the responses were positive and students expressed confidence in their improvisational abilities. The researcher found these responses congruent with the survey, the pre- and post-tests, as well as with the rubric-graded solos.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher asked the original research question, "What methodology for teaching improvisation is available to the beginning band music teacher?" She believes this unit was an effective way to introduce and impart the concept of improvisation to her first-year, sixth-grade band students. The results the data provided positive evidence to

support this hypothesis. As this type of music creating and performing has always intimidated the researcher, the evidence shows that her own musical biases were not carried on to her students.

One student in particular had struggled with learning to play the flute in the area of reading the notes and translating them into the correct fingerings. She had confided with the researcher that she did not think she was going to play in band in middle school. This student excelled with improvisation. She understood the rules and had great success improvising her own solos. Before, she did not volunteer in class; over the course of this unit, she always tried. Toward the end of the end of the unit, her hand was always the first one in the air. The researcher theorized that she had greater success because she did not have to read the notes as she improvised and therefore it was easier for her. With this success, her confidence improved, as did her tone, technique, and posture, and, ultimately, her note reading ability improved, as well. The researcher is proud to report that this student has gone on to middle school and is doing very well in seventh grade band. This student was a member of the Deep Branch Band, which entered into this study as the less proficient of the two bands.

The Oxendine band read and played well at the beginning of the study, the students in the Deep Branch Band struggled. Throughout the study, members of the Deep Branch Band improved rapidly in not only their improvisation but also their playing ability in general. The researcher observed that the increase in their confidence level was significant. The Oxendine Band was very proficient in its ability to read and perform music before the unit started and did well throughout the study. The researcher witnessed no large improvement in this band's musicianship as she did with the other band. The

students in the Oxendine Band in general behaved as if they were uncomfortable with the improvisational process, as if they would rather be reading the solos instead of improvising. Ultimately, the actions and comments of both bands lead the researcher to conclude that the Oxendine Band did not seem to enjoy this unit as well as the Deep Branch Band.

The researcher learned several things from the outcome of the surveys. First, the students from Oxendine Elementary reported much more confidence at the start of this unit than the students at Deep Branch Elementary. Second, at the conclusion of the unit the students of Deep Branch had a similar confidence level as the students at Oxendine Elementary. The researcher believes a possible reason for the high confidence level at Oxendine Elementary was the high level of the students' entering skill and the ease of mastery, witnessed by the teacher. In comparison, the students at Deep Branch Elementary had struggled with the concepts and skills taught to them before the improvisation unit. The students possibly believed the new musical concept would be just as challenging. Instead of struggling with this new concept, students in the Deep Branch Band excelled at improvising. With each lesson, they showed more and more confidence and a willingness to take chances. These aspects of the Deep Branch students' growth in improvising were reflected in their initial and concluding surveys.

Another conclusion to be drawn from the surveys is that learning to create music had a very low priority for students wanting to join the band. The researcher believes this is because the bands in the past have allocated all their resources in the area of recreating music instead of creating music. The students would be aware of this from past experiences with the band (for example, siblings and parents in the program). Since

students had never been exposed to the possibility of creating their own music, their lack of regard for learning the skill is a direct outcome.

In conclusion, research results indicate that improvisation should be included in the first year of instrumental education. This concept should be introduced as soon as correct note production has been established. For a band that struggles to read music, success in improvisation yields a beneficial impact. The researcher further concluded that, if improvisation is introduced as early as possible, the students will not become reliant on the printed music.

REFLECTIONS

Upon reflecting on this improvisation unit, the researcher has made a commitment that this will be a unit that she continues to teach to her first-year sixth-grade bands. She will, however, make some modifications to the unit. First, she will extend the unit to cover at least three of the four nine-week periods to give her students more opportunities to improve. This will also give the class the time to understand and explore the difference between striate and swung eighth notes so that swung eighth notes could be utilized in the students' improvisations. Second, she will include improvisation in one of the two concerts the sixth grade band presents each year. If results so indicate, she will schedule a third concert dedicated to improvisation. Third, this researcher will give her students more opportunities to be graded with the rubric. She believes this will benefit her students and allow for greater improvement in specific areas. The researcher also will have the students themselves grade their own improvisations to provide for enhanced self-reflection. Fourth, with the extended time provided to this unit, the researcher, will increase the time the band will play the accompanying music instead of relying primarily

on the CD. The band will then perform the accompaniment in concerts. With these modifications, this researcher believes that this unit will be an enhanced asset to her first year band program and facilitated the development of her students' creative voices.

Figures

Figure 1. This chart compares the improvisation unit's pre- and post-test scores for both Oxendine and Deep Branch band students. Pg.17

Figure 2. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 1 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 19

Figure 3. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 2 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 20

Figure 4. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 3 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 21

Figure 5. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 4 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 22

Figure 6. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 5 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 23

Figure 7. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 6 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 24

Figure 8. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 7 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 25

Figure 9. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 8 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 26

Figure 10. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 9 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 27

Figure 11. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 10 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students. Pg. 28

Figure 12. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 11 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.
Pg. 29

Figure 13. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 12 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.
Pg. 30

Figure 14. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 13 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.
Pg. 31

Figure 15. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 14 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.
Pg. 32

Figure 16. These charts compare the improvisation unit's survey results of question 15 of the initial and concluding survey for both the Deep Branch and Oxendine band students.
Pg. 33

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Appendix A
Parental Consent Form

Dear Parents,

I am currently working on my Master of Arts in Music Education degree at The University of North Carolina at Pembroke. During the next nine weeks, I will be conducting action research in my Oxendine Elementary School sixth grade band classes. The purpose of this project is to study improvisation in the first year of band. Students will learn how to improvise music using the twelve-bar blues form. What this means is they will learn to create original compositions as they play. This project will also support the National and North Carolina Standard Course of Study music standards.

Your son/daughter will be involved in this study by way of the following:

1. Pre-test on improvising music.
2. Post-test on improvising music.
3. Instruction with videotaping.
4. Journal reflections on the improvisational process.
5. A survey and self assessment of improvisational ability.

There are no foreseeable risks to the students involved. Specific information about individual students will be kept *strictly confidential*. The results from the study will not reference any individual student by his/her full name. The purpose of this form is to allow your child to participate in the study and to allow the researcher to use the information obtained from the actual study to analyze the outcomes of the study. The parent signature below also indicates that the student understands and agrees to participate cooperatively.

If you have additional questions regarding the study, please call me at the school (843-4243) or e-mail me at kam008@uncp.edu.

Sincerely,

Kari Mathews-Ricks

PRINCIPAL'S SIGNATURE

STUDENT'S NAME

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN

DATE

Appendix B

Improvisation in the First Year of Band

Lesson Plan Manual

By Kari Mathews-Ricks

The lessons in this manual were designed to fulfill the following competency goal as well as the two objectives from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

COMPETENCY GOAL 3: The learner will improvise melodies, variations, and accompaniments. (National Standard 3)

Objectives

3.01 Improvise simple melodic and rhythmic patterns.

3.02 Show respect for the improvisational efforts of others.

- **Lesson 1: What do you think about improvisation?**

- Class will take an initial survey about improvisation.

- **Lesson 2: What do you know about improvisation?**

- Class will take a pre-test about improvisation.

○ Lesson 3: What is improvisation?

- Class will listen to a mini-lecture on improvisation.
 - Description of improvisation
- What is Improvisation?
 - Improvisation is a form of art in which one or more people spontaneously and simultaneously
 - Compose
 - Interpret
 - Perform a musical work
 - *Grove's Dictionary of Music* states that improvisation is "The creation of a musical work, or the final form of a musical work, as it is being performed." (Nettl, 2007)
- Is improvisation just playing random notes?
 - Improvisation involves specific guidelines that provide the following framework for the performer:
 - Harmonic progression
 - The meter
 - The form
- What kinds of music utilize improvisation?
 - Classical music
 - Jazz music
 - Rock music
 - Listening activity

- Listen to recordings of Count Basie and Duke Ellington
- Journaling
 - What did you think about the music?
 - Does it sound like something you could learn to do?

○ Lesson 4: Rhythmic Improvisation I

- Call and response with clapping (four-beat)
 - Establish a steady beat: have students tap their foot.
 - Teacher claps a four-beat rhythm using quarter notes and eighth notes.
 - Class then repeats the rhythm the teacher performed. (Repeat several times)
 - Student claps a four-beat rhythm using quarter notes and eighth notes.
 - Class then repeats the rhythm the student performed. (Repeat a few times with different students.)
- Phrases, phrase segments, and questions/answer
 - Teacher selects one student to clap a four beat rhythm (question) then the teacher claps a four beat responding rhythm (answer)
 - Increase pattern to eight beats.
 - Teacher will select three groups of two students to clap eight-beat question-and-answer phrase segments to run concurrently to create a twelve-bar rhythmic improvisation.
 - Teacher will repeat this activity but, instead of clapping students, will play the root note of the twelve-bar-blues progression.

• Lesson 5: Rhythmic Improvisation II

- Soloist claps over rhythmic ostinato
 - Teacher determines a four-beat repeated pattern. (i.e. an ostinato)
 - Class members pat that pattern on their laps continuously while the teacher selects soloists to clap four-beat pattern over the ostinato.
(Repeat until every student performs.)
 - Increase pattern to eight beats.
- Phrases, phrase segments, and questions/answer
 - Teacher selects one student to clap a four-beat rhythm (question) and then the teacher claps a four-beat responding rhythm (answer).
 - Increase pattern to eight-beats.
 - Teacher will select three groups of two students to clap eight-beat question-and-answer phrase segments to run concurrently to create a twelve-bar rhythmic improvisation.
 - Teacher will repeat this activity but instead of clapping students will play the flat third note of the twelve-bar-blues progression.

• Lesson 6: Rhythmic Improvisation III

- Soloist trade off 4-beat solos over ostinato
 - Teacher determines a 4-beat repeated pattern. (i.e. an ostinato)
 - Class pats that pattern on their laps continuously while the teacher selects soloists to trade off clapped 4-beat patterns over the ostinato. (repeat several times to allow more students to try)
- Phrases, phrase segments, and questions/answer
 - Teacher will select three groups of two students to clap eight beat question and answer phrase segments to run concurrently to create a twelve bar rhythmic improvisation.
 - Teacher will review the concept of question and answer phrases by comparing it to a spoken conversation. (Make sure you are talking about the same thing.)
 - Teacher will repeat this activity but instead of clapping, students will play the flatted fifth and the fifth notes of the twelve-bar-blues progression.

• Lesson 7: Rhythmic Improvisation IV

- Soloist trade off four-beat solos over ostinato
 - Teacher determines a four-beat repeated pattern. (i.e., an ostinato)
 - Students pat that pattern on their laps continuously while the teacher selects soloists to trade clapping a four beat pattern.
 - Increase pattern to eight-beats
- Phrases, phrase segments, and questions/answer
 - Teacher will select three groups of students will play the fifth or the flat third note of the twelve-bar-blues progression. Paying particular attention to whether or not their musical conversation makes sense.
- Journaling
 - What did you think of these rhythm activities?
 - Did you feel successful at these activities?

• Lesson 8: What is the 12 Bar Blues?

- Mini-lecture on the history of the twelve-bar blues
 - What is the music, “The Blues,” about?
 - Though the lyric of the blues dealt with personal adversity, the sentiment of the music is often about overcoming hard luck and ridding your self of frustration.
 - When and where did the blues come from?
 - It originated on the Southern plantations during the nineteenth century, particularly in Mississippi.
 - Who created it?
 - Slaves and later ex-slave sharecroppers, who sang as they worked in the cotton fields, created it.
 - It evolved from African spirituals, African chants, work songs, field hollers, revivalists’ hymns, and country dances.
 - What happened to it after it left Mississippi?
 - In the 1930s and 40s, “The Blues” made it way up the Mississippi River to Chicago where it was accompanied by electric instruments and became “Chicago Blues.” It later gave birth to “Rhythm and Blues.”
 - Today there are many different shades of “The Blues.” Forms include:

- **Traditional county Blues** - A general term that describes the rural Blues of the Mississippi Delta, the Piedmont and other rural locales;
- **Jump blues** - A danceable amalgam of swing and blues was a precursor to R&B. Jump blues was pioneered by Louis Jordan.
- **Boogie-woogie** - A piano-based blues popularized by Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson, and derived from barrelhouse and ragtime.
- **Chicago blues** - Delta blues electrified.
- **Cool blues**- A sophisticated piano-based form that owes much to jazz.
- **West Coast blues** - Popularized mainly by Texas musicians who moved to California. West Coast blues is heavily influenced by the swing beat.
- The **Texas blues**, **Memphis blues**, and **St. Louis blues** consist of a wide variety of subgenres. **Louisiana blues** is characterized by a swampy guitar or harmonica sound with lots of echo, while **Kansas City blues** is jazz oriented - think Count Basie. There is also the **British blues**, a rock-blues hybrid pioneered by John Mayall, Peter Green and Eric Clapton. **New Orleans blues** is largely piano-based, with the exception of some talented guitarists such as Guitar Slim and Snooks Eaglin. (Most people are familiar with **blues rock**.) (Kopp, 2005)
 - Introduction to the-12-bar blues pattern
 - Listening example: "One O'clock Jump," by Count Basie
 - Teacher will give a short description of the song prior to playing it.
 - Journaling
 - What did you think of the blues?
 - Have you every heard anything like it before, explain?

• Lesson 9: 12-Bar Blues Pattern

- Pattern recognition
 - Teacher draws visual representation of twelve-bar-blues on the board.
 - Students get three cards with the chord numbers on them and are instructed to hold up corresponding card as teacher directs them through the pattern.
 - Students tap a steady 4-beat pattern with their feet as one student leads them through the pattern. Students continue to hold up the corresponding card. (Repeat this while several students lead the band.)

• Lesson 10: 12-Bar Blues Pattern with CD

Accompaniment

- Pattern recognition with musical accompaniment
 - Students tap a steady 4-beat pattern with their feet as one student leads them through the pattern. Students continue to hold up the corresponding card.
 - Teacher plays a CD with a repeating twelve- bar-blues chord change pattern.
 - Teacher plays it again this time hold up the corresponding card with the chord changes.
 - Students imitate teacher with their cards on the third time through.
 - Student volunteers take over for teacher and lead the class through the pattern. (Repeat until all students have had a chance to lead the class.)

• Lesson 11: Blues Scale

- Introduction of the blues scale
 - Mini lecture about major scale
 - Teacher will write out a B flat major scale on the board and show students the pattern of whole steps and half steps in the scale.
 - The teacher will then demonstrate the scale on the flute.
 - Mini lecture about the blues pentatonic scale
 - The teacher will change the pattern on the scale on the board from a major scale to a blues pentatonic scale.
 - The teacher will then demonstrate the new scale on the flute.
 - The teacher will then hand out a scale sheet for each of the students and then the class will play through the first blues pentatonic scale.
 - The teacher will assign the other two scales for homework.
- Journal
 - Explain the difference between the blues scale and the major scale, as it sound to you.

• Lesson 12: Two Notes with Pre-established Rhythms

- Improvising a solo phrases with two notes per chord
 - Class would create four-beat rhythm that was then written on the board by the teacher.
 - Three students will volunteer to improvise one of the three phrases of the twelve-bar-blues.
 - Students in the band would hold up the chord change cards to help soloist remember the changes.
 - The students will improvise a solo with the written rhythm and the first and flatted seventh notes of the blues scale.
 - The students will be accompanied with the CD.

- **Lesson 13: One Note with Pre-established Riff**

- Improvising a solo with one note per chord
 - Class would create four-beat rhythm that was then written on the board.
 - Teacher will introduce and demonstrate the difference between straight and swung eighth notes.
 - A student will volunteer to improvise a twelve-bar-blues solo.
 - Students in the band would hold up the chord change cards to help soloist remember the changes.
 - A student will improvise a solo using the first note of their blues scale for each chord with the pre-established rhythm and the CD accompaniment.

• Lesson 14: Two Notes with Pre-established Riff

6

- Improvising a solo with two notes per chord
 - Class would create two four-beat rhythms that they will play on the first and flatted third note of the blues pentatonic scale for practice several times to establish some possible riffs.
 - A student will volunteer to improvise a solo.
 - Students in the band would hold up the chord change cards to help soloist remember the changes.
 - Student would improvise a solo using the first and the flatted third of the blues pentatonic scale and the established riffs with a CD accompaniment.

• Lesson 15: Three Notes with Pre-established Riff

- Improvising a solo with three notes per chord
 - Class would create two new four-beat rhythms that they will play on the first, the flatted third, and the fifth notes of each blues pentatonic scales for practice several times to establish some possible riffs.
 - Students will volunteer to improvise one of three phrases of the solo.
 - Students in the band would hold up the chord change cards to help soloist remember the changes.
 - Student would improvise phrase solos using same three notes of the blues pentatonic scales and the established riffs with a CD accompaniment.

• Lesson 16: Trading off Blues Solos

- Improvising four measure solos
 - Three students will pick a four measure portion of the twelve bar blues.
 - The teacher will remind the students about making sure that their musical conversation (question/answer) makes sense and introduce them to a possible phrasing pattern of:
 - A1 I I I I
 - A2 IV IV I I
 - B V IV I I
 - Students in the band would hold up the chord change cards to help soloist remember the changes.
 - Each student will improvise a 4-measure segment of the solo using the first, the flatted third, and fifth note of the corresponding blues scale with their original rhythm.
 - A CD will accompany the solos.
- Journaling
 - Did you enjoy improvising portions of the blues solo? Why?

• Lesson 17: Full Twelve Bar Blues Solos

- Improvising full twelve-measure solos
 - Teacher will explain to them that certain notes work well together, for instance: first and flatted seventh, fourth and flatted third, fifth and flatted fifth, and fifth and fourth.
 - Teacher will demonstrate this by first improvising a solo.
 - A student will improvise a full twelve-bar-blues solo.
 - The student will improvise a solo using any of the corresponding scales with their original rhythms.
 - The band will accompany the solo.
- Journaling
 - What did you like most about improvising your own solo?
 - Do you feel comfortable with this type of performing? If so, “Why?” If not, “Why not?”

• Lesson 18: Recording Day

- Make video recordings of improvisation solo
 - Set the classroom up as the performing stage.
 - Have the media teacher come and record each student's improvisational solo.
 - Grade the attempts with a pre-established rubric.
- Journaling
 - What did it feel like to perform in front of a camera?
 - Did you enjoy creating your own solo?

- **Lesson 19: Now what do you know about improvisation?**

- Class will take a post-test on improvisation.

- **Lesson 20: Now what do you think about improvisation?**

- Class will take a concluding survey about improvisation

a

Appendix C

Blues Penatonic Scales

Blues Penatonic Scales

Flute

Mallets

Flute

Mallets

Fl.

Mal.

Fl.

Mal.

Fl.

Mal.

Fl.

Mal.

Blues Penatonic Scales

B \flat Clarinet



B \flat Trumpet



B \flat Cl.



B \flat Tpt.



B \flat Cl.



B \flat Tpt.



Blues Penatonic Scales

Horn in F



Blues Penatonic Scales

Trombone

Baritone (B.C.)

Tuba

First system of musical notation for Trombone, Baritone (B.C.), and Tuba. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The Trombone and Baritone parts play a descending scale: B-flat, A, G, F, E-flat, D, C, B-flat. The Tuba part plays a descending scale: B-flat, A, G, F, E-flat, D, C, B-flat. The notation is in bass clef.

Tbn.

Bar.

Tba.

Second system of musical notation for Tbn., Bar., and Tba. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The Tbn. and Bar. parts play a descending scale: B-flat, A, G, F, E-flat, D, C, B-flat. The Tba. part plays a descending scale: B-flat, A, G, F, E-flat, D, C, B-flat. The notation is in bass clef.

Tbn.

Bar.

Tba.

Third system of musical notation for Tbn., Bar., and Tba. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The Tbn. and Bar. parts play a descending scale: B-flat, A, G, F, E-flat, D, C, B-flat. The Tba. part plays a descending scale: B-flat, A, G, F, E-flat, D, C, B-flat. The notation is in bass clef.

Appendix D

Improvisation Unit Initial Survey

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree D= Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree DK = Don't Know

- | | |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. I enjoy playing my instrument with the band. | SA A D SD DK |
| 2. I enjoy playing my instrument by myself. | SA A D SD DK |
| 3. I joined band so I could learn to read music. | SA A D SD DK |
| 4. I joined band so I could play music in an ensemble. | SA A D SD DK |
| 5. I joined band so I could create music. | SA A D SD DK |
| 6. I joined band so I could play my instrument by myself. | SA A D SD DK |
| 7. When I play my instrument with the band, I feel confident. | SA A D SD DK |
| 8. When I play my instrument by myself in front of the band, I feel confident. | SA A D SD DK |
| 9. I am excited about learning how to improvise. | SA A D SD DK |
| 10. I can read music well. | SA A D SD DK |

Appendix E

Improvisation Test

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 1) What is improvisation?
 - a. A double reed instrument
 - b. A type of music that is composed as it is performed
 - c. A tempo marking
 - d. A type of music that is always written
- 2) How many measures are in twelve-bar blues?
 - a. 12
 - b. 16
 - c. 11
 - d. 24
- 3) How many phrases are in the twelve-bar blues pattern?
 - a. 2
 - b. 5
 - c. 6
 - d. 3
- 4) What is the smallest number of pitches in a chord?
 - a. 2
 - b. 4
 - c. 5
 - d. 3
- 5) What is the dominant (V) chord?
 - a. The chord that is the loudest
 - b. The chord that is the most important
 - c. The chord that pushes all the other chords around
 - d. The chord that is built on the fifth note of the scale
- 6) What is the first chord in the twelve-bar-blues progression?
 - a. The tonic (I)
 - b. The dominant (V)
 - c. The sub-dominant (IV)
 - d. The sub-tonic (VII)

7) In what time signature is twelve-bar blues typically written?

- | | |
|------|------|
| a. 3 | c. 6 |
| 4 | 8 |
| b. 2 | d. 4 |
| 4 | 4 |

8) What is the sub-dominant (IV) chord?

- a. A submissive chord
- b. The chord built on the first note of the scale
- c. The chord built on the fourth pitch of the scale
- d. An under-water chord

9) What is the tonic (I) chord?



- a. The chord built on the first pitch of the scale
- b. A chord built on the seventh note of the scale
- c. A type of hair product
- d. A chord that only has two pitches












10) Where did the musical form "The Blues" originate?

- a. In Chicago
- b. In the rural South
- c. In Robeson County
- d. In New York City


Appendix F

Permission to use Dr. David Snyder's lesson plans for
Improvisation Unit


WebMail - RE: Requesting use of material



 Delete
  File
  Create
  Reply
  Reply All
  Forward
  Previous
  Next
  Options
  Index
  Help

Date Sent: Thursday, December 09, 2004 8:48 AM

From: David Snyder <dsnyder@ilstu.edu> 

To: kam008

Subject: RE: Requesting use of material

 ☐ Urgent ☐ New

I would be honored. Please send me a copy of your thesis when its completed.

David Snyder
 Illinois State University
 Campus Box 5660
 Normal, Il 61790

At 09:59 PM 12/8/2004, you wrote:
 >Dr. Snyder,
 >I am currently a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at
 >Pembroke. I am in the process of gaining my masters in Music Education. For
 >my thesis I have chosen to focus on implementing improvisation into the four
 >6th grade bands I teach in Robeson County. I am hoping to incorporate lesson
 >plans that my colleagues and I have created as well as those I have
 >located in
 >my research. During this process I read your article in the November 2003,
 >addition of the Jazz Education Journal. In this article you described 6
 >lesson plans that were amazing; I am looking forward to using them in my
 >class. Which brings me to the point of this communication, I would like to
 >request your permission to include your lesson plans in my thesis, with the
 >proper citations, of course. If it is at all possible, please respond by
 >Friday, December 10th. I greatly appreciate your time and consideration.
 >Sincerely, Kari Mathews-Ricks



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Appendix G

Roman Numeral Chord Identification Cards

I

AL

A

Appendix H

12 Bar Blues

12 Bar Blues

Flute

B♭ Clarinet

B♭ Trumpet

Trombone

Tuba

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

The musical score is for a 12-bar blues in E-flat major (three flats) and 4/4 time. It consists of seven staves. The first four staves are for melodic instruments: Flute, B♭ Clarinet, B♭ Trumpet, and Trombone. The last two staves are for percussion: Snare Drum and Bass Drum. The Flute part plays a simple melody of quarter notes with rests. The B♭ Clarinet and B♭ Trumpet play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Trombone plays a sustained harmonic line with a slur. The Tuba plays a steady eighth-note bass line. The Snare Drum and Bass Drum provide a consistent rhythmic foundation.

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Tba.

S.Dr.

B. Dr.

The musical score is for a 12-bar blues in B-flat major. It consists of six staves: Flute (Fl.), B-flat Clarinet (B♭ Cl.), B-flat Trumpet (B♭ Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), Tuba (Tba.), and Drums (S.Dr. and B. Dr.). The score is divided into five measures, each containing two staves. The Flute and B-flat Clarinet parts are in the treble clef, while the B-flat Trumpet, Trombone, and Tuba parts are in the bass clef. The Snare and Bass Drums are in the bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major). The tempo is 120 beats per minute. The score is for a 12-bar blues, with the first five measures shown on this page.

12 Bar Blues

3

Fl.

B♭ Cl.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Tba.

S. Dr.

B. Dr.

Fl.

Bb Cl.

Bb Tpt.

Tbn.

Tba.

S.Dr.

B. Dr.

The musical score is for a 12-bar blues in B-flat major. It features seven staves: Flute (Fl.), Bb Clarinet (Bb Cl.), Bb Trumpet (Bb Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), Tuba (Tba.), Snare Drum (S.Dr.), and Bass Drum (B. Dr.). The first staff (Fl.) has a whole rest in the first bar, followed by a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the second bar. The second staff (Bb Cl.) has a whole rest in the first bar, followed by a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the second bar. The third staff (Bb Tpt.) has a whole rest in the first bar, followed by a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the second bar. The fourth staff (Tbn.) has a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the first bar, followed by a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the second bar. The fifth staff (Tba.) has a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the first bar, followed by a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the second bar. The sixth staff (S.Dr.) has a whole rest in the first bar, followed by a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the second bar. The seventh staff (B. Dr.) has a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the first bar, followed by a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter rest in the second bar.

Appendix I Improvisation



Name: _____

Teacher: Kari Mathews-Ricks

	Criteria				Points
	4	3	2	1	
Notes	The student played more than one pitch per chord and they have all been correct.	The student played more than one pitch per chord and the majority of them have been correct.	The student played a single pitch per chord, but the note was correct.	The student played random notes. If a correct note was played it was only by chance.	_____
Rhythms	The student played different grade appropriate rhythms throughout the twelve measures and maintained recommended rhythmic phrases.	Some of the rhythms played were too advanced for the grade but the student did maintain recommended rhythmic phrasing.*	The student played the same rhythm for all twelve measures but it was an appropriate rhythm for first year band.	The student played rhythms too advanced for the grade and made no attempt to maintain recommended rhythmic phrasing.*	_____
Posture and Volume and Tone Quality	Student used proper posture with appropriate breath support to create good tone quality. Volume level was also correct	Student had poor posture but played too loudly drowning out the recording they were accompanying.	Student sat up straight but used insufficient breath support, which created a poor tone quality. Volume was too soft.	Student slouched and because of this played too softly and with poor tone quality due to poor breath support.	_____
Techniques and Tounging	Student used correct fingerings hand position and tonguing through out the twelve measures.	Student tongued correctly some of the time and used correct fingering as well proper hand position through out the twelve measures.	Student use incorrect alternative fingerings or poor hand position but use appropriate tonguing.	Student separated all of their notes with their diaphragm instead of their tongue, use incorrect hand position, as well as incorrect alternative fingerings.	_____
Blues Structure	Student completed all twelve measures of progression correctly. Student also followed recommended phrase structure.	Student completed all twelve measures of the progression correctly but neglected recommended phrasing structure.	Student did not complete all twelve measures though he/she was aware of correct progression. Student may have stopped but reentered and attempted to finish the progression.	Student failed to complete twelve-measure progression and made no attempt to finish.	_____
				Total---->	_____

Teacher Comments: _____

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- The teacher felt obligated to use only rhythms that applied to first-year-band to reinforce rhythm comprehension.

Appendix J

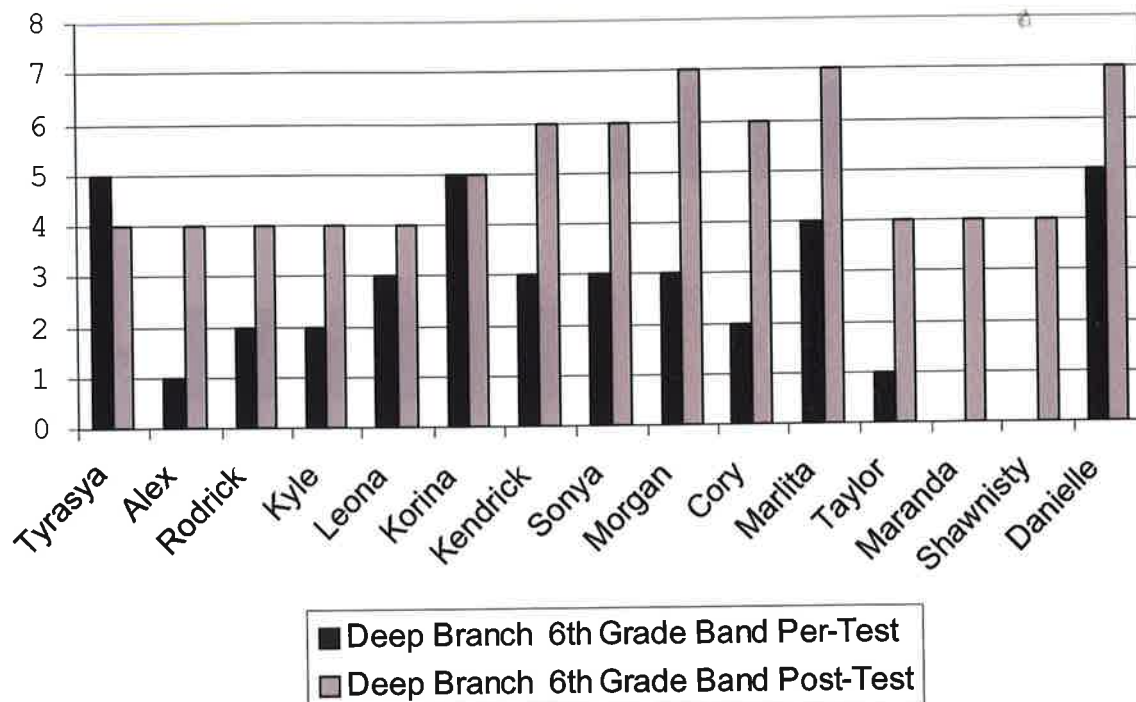
Improvisation Unit Concluding Survey

SA = Strongly Agree A=Agree D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree DK=Don't Know

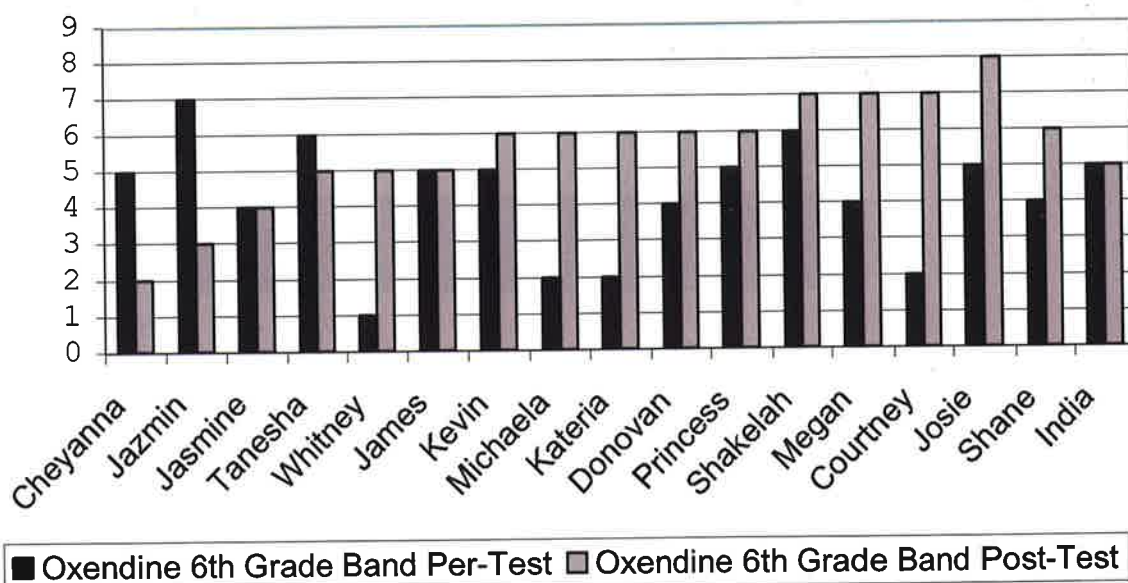
1. I enjoy playing my instrument with the band.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
2. I enjoy playing my instrument by myself.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
3. I joined band so I could learn to read music.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
4. I joined band so I could play music in an ensemble.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
5. I joined band so I could create music.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
6. I joined band so I could play my instrument by myself.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
7. When I play my instrument with the band, I feel confident.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
8. When I play my instrument by myself in front of the band, I feel confident.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
9. I am excited about learning how to improvise.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
10. I can read music well.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
11. I enjoyed learning to improvise music.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
12. I can improvise music in my band class.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
13. I enjoy improvising music in band class.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
14. I know more about music now that I am able to improvise music.	SA	A	D	SD	DK
15. I am a better musician now that I know how to improvise music.	SA	A	D	SD	DK

Appendix K

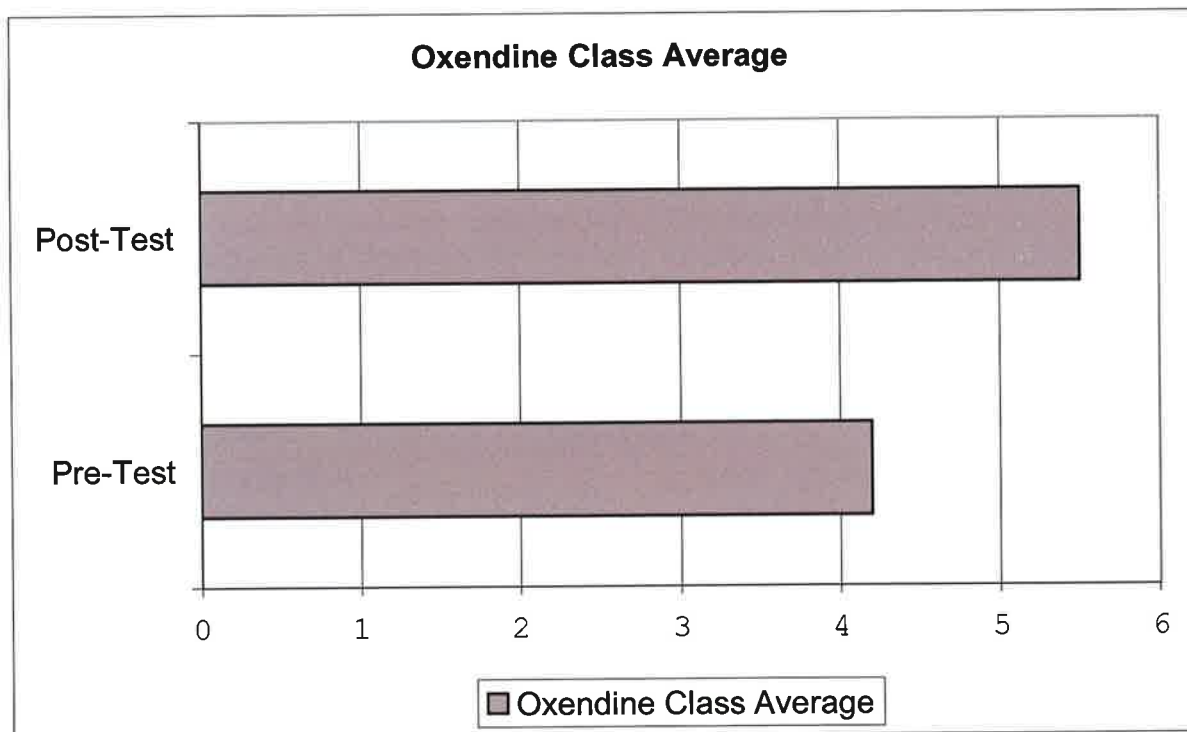
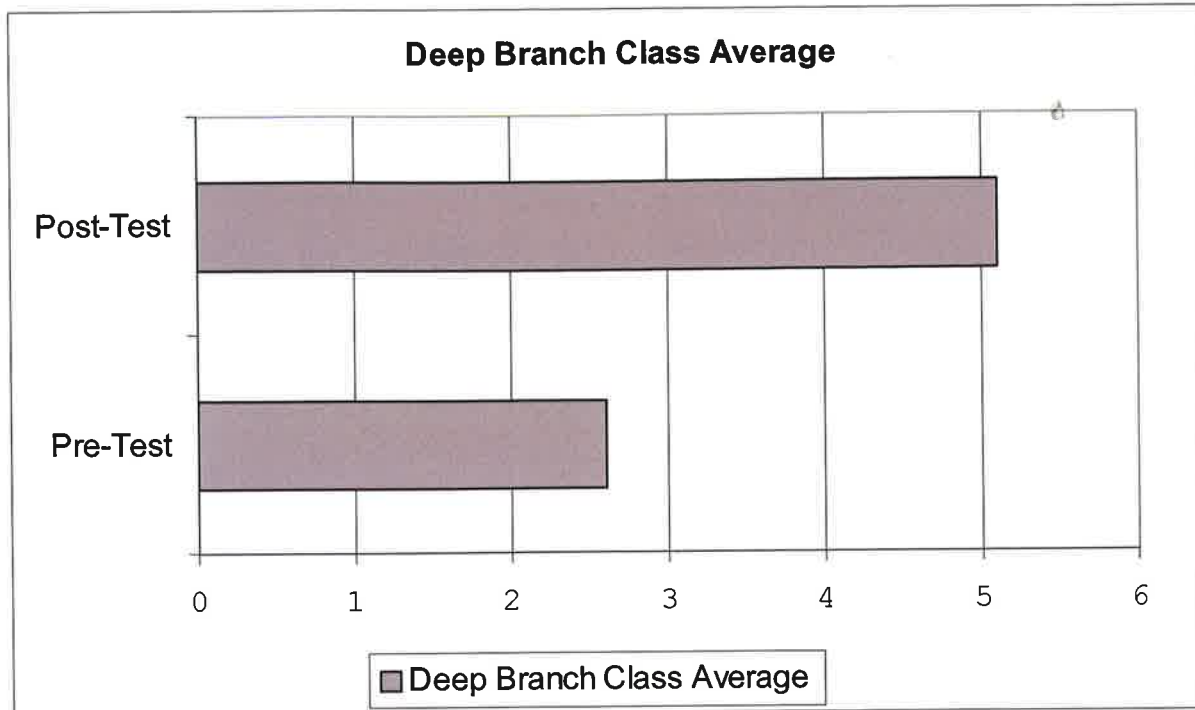
Deep Branch Elementary Sixth Grade Pre-Test and Post-Test



Oxendine Elementary 6th Grade Band Pre-Test and Post-Test



Appendix L



Appendix M

IRB Approval Form

Coversheet
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
Request for Review of Human Subjects Research

Principal Investigator: Kari Mathews-Ricks Department: Music

Faculty Advisor(s): Janita K. Byars Department: Music

Department: _____

Telephone number: 910-266-9611 Email Address: kam008@uncp.edu

Funding Source: _____ (if applicable)

Check any that apply:

Thesis project: ☒ Classroom project: _____ Grant proposal: _____ Research project: _____

Faculty: _____ Staff: _____ Graduate Student: ☒ Undergraduate Student: _____ Contract Org: _____

Initial Request: ☒ Annual Review: _____ Protocol Change: _____

Title of Project and Brief Description:

Design and Implementation of a Unit on Improvisation for First-year Instrumental Students

The research will strive to answer questions about how beginning band students benefit from the incorporation of improvisation into their program of study. Pre- and post-tests will address knowledge, skills, and self-concept. Journal-writing will be included in unit activities.

Date Received by IRB: 2/15/06

Initial recommendation:

Exempt from board review: ☒

Expedited review: _____

Full board review: _____

Signature of Chair or Designee:

Howard A. Ling PhD

Final IRB Recommendation:

Approved as submitted: ☒

Approved with noted conditions: _____

Not approved: _____

Date: 2/15/06

This approval expires in one year from the date above. If significant changes are made to the protocol, prior approval must be obtained from the IRB. If you disagree with this decision you have the right to appeal.