IN SEARCH OF MUSICAL INDEPENDENCE:
A CRITICAL REALIST EXPLORATION OF
TEACHER DECISION MAKING AND LEARNER PROCESSES
IN HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Some music education scholars have suggested that large ensemble-based school music instruction is outdated and irrelevant to contemporary society (Kratus, 2007; Williams, 2011), teacher-centric and autocratic (O'Toole, 2005), and complicit in creating teacher-dependent students (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). Recently, Weidner explored musical independence in large instrumental ensembles (2015, 2020), and proposed that student-centered teaching practices may contribute to developing musical independence in band.

Although many scholars have examined the concept of musical independence (MI) (Regelski, 1969; Shieh & Allsup, 2016; Stamer, 2002), most have done so from a theoretical viewpoint. There is current empirical work exploring MI in band (Weidner, 2015, 2020), but more research is needed to explore the phenomenon in choirs. New empirical research can help broaden the conceptual understanding of MI, explore how teachers foster MI in choirs, and help uncover what students believe about their opportunities to develop it.

In this study, I examined what teachers and learners do in secondary choral settings to develop musical independence. Additionally, I sought to uncover potential structural constraints and affordances which may hinder or support teaching and learning musical independence in choir. The research questions were: 1) What are the skills, dispositions, and agentive characteristics of musically independent students? 2) What instructional decisions do teachers make that facilitate or inhibit musical independence? 3) What are the contextual factors that inhibit or facilitate musical independence in students?

To answer these questions, I designed a multiple case study (Yin, 2018) utilizing critical realism (Bhaskar, 2015) as a theoretical and analytical framework. Critical realists seek to explain how a phenomenon happened by considering both potential causal mechanisms and the

context within which they may occur (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Using this lens, I consider the actions of teachers and students as well as potential structural influences upon their actions.

I collected data from three research sites. Data sources included (1) field notes of classroom observations, (2) teacher journals, (3) student journals, (4) teacher interviews, and (5) student interviews. I analyzed data through the critical realist process of retroduction (Wynn & Williams, 2012) by first making inferences as to probable causal mechanisms for musical independence. Then, I compared proposed causal mechanisms to data found in multiple streams of evidence (e.g., interviews, field notes, and journal entries), moving from open to axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). I first looked within each case (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using pattern-matching logic (Yin, 2018) to compare empirical data to patterns I predicted through retroduction. Then I engaged in cross-case analysis to determine if patterns persisted over multiple cases.

My cross-case analysis suggested that teachers and students may have different perceptions of MI. Some teachers believed helping students develop skills was most important to MI, whereas many students felt that MI was better defined by an ability to communicate emotional intent and form social connections through music. Participants also considered the role of outside structural influences upon MI such as community expectations, professional pressures, and state festival results. Based on the findings from each case and the cross-case analysis, I offered implications for music teacher education and practicing high school choir teachers, including rethinking the role of notational literacy in choral music, balancing large-group and small group learning experiences, and the importance of creative music making in choral ensembles.

To my former students:
For the ways you encouraged me to pursue my dreams, the ways you believed
in me, and the ways in which you challenged me to grow.

career to encouraging future music educators to look to their students for the answers, so that our

profession can best work to make music an enduring part of people's lives.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Choir is a fixture in US public schools, with 13% of students enrolling at some point in secondary school (Elpus & Abril, 2019). Reform-minded music education scholars have suggested that large ensemble-based school music instruction practices common in choir classrooms are outdated and irrelevant to contemporary society (Kratus, 2007; Williams, 2011), teacher-centric and autocratic (O'Toole, 2005), and complicit in creating teacher-dependent students (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). Recently, Weidner challenged these assertions (2015, 2020), proposing that student-centered teaching practices in large instrumental ensembles may contribute to developing independent student musicians and encourage lifelong music learning. However, researchers have not investigated how teaching practices and learner behaviors in secondary choir settings might foster independent student music-making and lifelong musical involvement. In this dissertation, I explored what it means to be musically independent and examined teaching practices and learner processes in choir that may support musical independence.

Personal Background

During my twenty years as a secondary choir teacher, I often told students that my primary goal as a music educator was to help them become independent, lifelong musicians who could make music on their own. I led daily sight-singing exercises, incorporated music theory into our rehearsal process, and asked open-ended questions to encourage singers to individually decode information and make musical decisions from notated scores. By all outward appearances, students in my classes were engaged and empowered learners, gaining skills that they could use throughout a lifetime of music-making. Toward the end of my public-school

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teaching career, one of the most active and accomplished choristers in the school approached me after class and told me that they were planning to drop choir. Incredulous at the sudden change of heart, I asked them why they wanted to quit. The student calmly explained that while the class was fun, they did not plan to do anything with music after high school, so remaining in choir was a waste of time. I tried to persuade them that there were many opportunities to sing in choirs after high school and that singing can be a lifetime endeavor. They simply smiled, thanked me for my interest in them over the years, and asked for a pass to the counselor's office to change their schedule. With nothing left to say other than how much I would miss them, I filled out the pass and wished them well.

Certainly, there are many explanations for what may have led to this student's decision to leave choir, but something that the student said kept tugging at me—that they didn't plan to do anything with music after high school. Here was a student who had been in all-state choir, earned top ratings at solo and ensemble contest, and performed with a successful competitive show choir, all activities I thought were markers of the skills necessary to be an independent, lifelong musician. I could not help feeling that something about their experience in choir prevented them from using the skills they acquired for the rest of their lives. I asked myself: what—or perhaps more importantly—who is school music education for if music learning and participation end the moment students walk out the classroom door?

My interest in fostering independent musicianship also stems from my recent observations of student teachers working in public school choir settings. While watching pre-service music educators lead rehearsals, I recognized elements from my own teaching and, for the first time, saw their potential limitations. The instruction I observed was exclusively teacher led, consisting mainly of error detection and artistic guidance from the podium. Although these

practices generally improved the ensemble's performance, they also seemed to dissuade individual student involvement. The routines, exercises, and rehearsal techniques I observed were familiar to me, but from my new vantage point away from the podium, the climate felt strangely sterile and mechanical. I considered what I saw and reflected back to my former student. Might my well-intentioned practices have created a similar environment in my choirs? Was there something about how I was teaching choir that stifled student curiosity and disempowered them?

The Legacy of Large Ensembles in School Music

There is a long-standing concern among music education scholars that participating in school music does not lead to musical engagement in adult life. Edgar Gordon, a former music professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and past president of the Music Supervisors' National Conference—now known as the National Association for Music Education (NAfME)—wrote in 1936:

> It too frequently happens that boys and girls who are valuable members of high-school musical organizations make little or no use of their music outside the school. Initiative for the making of music seems to rest solely with the music teacher. Throughout the entire country the promotion of musical enterprises has been too largely in adult hands; little encouragement has been given to young people to promote their own projects. The youth of America have not only become dependent, but they have also failed to discover the delights and recreative pleasures that a small group of players or singers may have (Gordon, 1936, p. 189).

Calls for curricular change in school music education continued as reformers sought strategies to promote student engagement and heightened relevancy. Scholars at the Yale Seminar of 1963 and

the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium suggested more non-Western and popular music ensembles as well as music composition courses be added to school music to "help each individual find means for self-realization, either as creator or as participant audience" (Choate, 1968).

Contemporary critics often focus upon the large ensemble format of instruction, which is currently the most prevalent form of music education in US secondary schools (Elpus & Abril, 2019). Some have asserted that large ensemble music instruction contributes to the divide between school music and lifelong music-making (Kratus, 2007; Myers, 2008). A central point in their argument is that the curricular goals and instructional practices involved in preparing ensembles for performance are not consistent with developing "skills and understandings that empower people to fulfill their musical drives and potential over a lifetime" (Myers, 2008). Instead, ensemble classes that focus solely on large group performance can lead to teacher-centric modes of instruction designed for efficient rehearsals of previously composed music. Bartel (2001) described these teacher-centric practices as the *rehearsal model*, and identified it as the dominant instructional paradigm in North American secondary music education (Bartel, 2004).

Critiques of the Rehearsal Model

Scholars have long criticized the rehearsal model in music education literature (Allsup & Benedict, 2008; Kratus, 2007; O'Toole, 2005; Wall, 2018; Williams, 2011). Some researchers are concerned that the music studied in school ensemble settings is disconnected from students' musical lives (Kratus, 2007; Kruse, 2016; Tobias, 2015). Kratus (2007) asserted that this disconnect has contributed to declining enrollment in music programs in some US states. Notably, the scholars mentioned here did not propose ways of changing large ensemble instruction to heighten musical relevance for students. Instead, they suggested alternative

learning formats such as popular music ensembles and songwriting classes to better connect with young people's musical interests.

Another concern scholars raised with the rehearsal model is how teacher-centric pedagogies common in many ensemble rehearsals may impact student learning. Wall (2018) believed that traditional teacher-centric practices create impediments to student creativity. He asserted that ensemble directors who are focused upon preparing for public concerts often feel that they lack the time for students to explore creative endeavors such as improvisation or composition. Instead, many directors prioritize repetitive drill and practice strategies focused on producing accurate re-creations of previously composed music. Williams (2011) noted that not only do such traditional methods thwart creativity, but instructors' insistence on technical proficiency may also prevent new students from participating in ensembles that require previous musical experience.

Teacher-centric instruction in ensembles may also disempower music students, leading them to be less likely to make musical decisions for themselves. Drawing on Foucault (1979), O'Toole (2005) described how asymmetrical power structures often found in choirs can render singers into docile bodies subordinate to the director. Through the architecture (i.e., standing formations oriented at a director who stands on a podium), traditions, and pedagogy of choir, O'Toole argued, singers are made wholly dependent upon the institutional knowledge of the director, effectively silencing the knowledge and experiences of choir members. Allsup and Benedict (2008) suggested that teacher-centered practices in school bands intended to promote efficient learning of repertoire may instead create a culture of dependent learners. Benedict stated:

If we buy into [a] method of teaching…that is predominantly teacher-centered, teacher

transmitted, and content/repertoire driven, then we are deluding ourselves if we think our

students are actually taking on the responsibility of independent musicianship or

becoming more musical (p. 169).

Such teacher dependency may create an ensemble of student musicians waiting for explicit

directions from their director, singularly focused on performing the music exactly the way they

have been taught.

Proposed Reforms: Transformations and Tensions in Music Education

Some scholars have suggested reforming the rehearsal model by shifting curricular focus

from large ensembles to popular music pedagogies (Green, 2006; Kratus, 2007), including

through alternative ensembles such as rock bands (Powell & Burnstein, 2017) and iPad

ensembles (Williams, 2014). Many of these reformers favor abandoning large ensembles in

school music entirely, instead focusing on more individual and small group work in song writing,

musical creativity, and discussion-based inquiry that explores music's role in society. Such a

reorientation, they argue, may increase music education's relevance to individual students,

allowing more opportunities for self-discovery and exploration.

It is difficult to ignore the critiques of the rehearsal model. Yet the proposed solution of

completely dissolving large ensembles obviates the possibility that large ensembles might be

taught in ways that promote musical independence. I contend that there are many choir teachers

who are already teaching this way, providing spaces in choirs for students to explore music that

matters to them. Many students thrive in large ensembles and build skills for lifelong music-

making through their experiences in bands, choirs, and orchestras. Eliminating band, choir, and

orchestra on the grounds that these ensembles have little application after high school ignores the

prevalence of adult music groups in civic and religious settings and the prominent social role

music ensembles can play in adult life. For many people, it is the opportunity to join with others in music making that is the primary influence in their decision to participate in music, both in school and later in adulthood (Carucci, 2012). Large ensembles are an indelible feature of public life and can help individuals build social capital through their interactions with others (Jones & Langston, 2012). Casting aside institutions with such enduring value to so many people would turn music education against itself and disenfranchise those who find fulfillment in ensemble music making.

Instead of dismantling large ensembles in public schools, I argue there is a need to reimagine instructional practices and emancipate ensemble music education from the restrictions of the rehearsal model in a way that balances group and individual needs. This means increasing student empowerment, broadening the inclusiveness of repertoire in large-ensemble curricula, and increasing collaborative music making opportunities between teachers and students (Miksza, 2013). In these reimagined spaces, students "make decisions that matter" (Shieh & Allsup, 2016) about artistry, repertoire, and their own musical interests, all while still having the experience of making music in a large ensemble. Following Shieh and Allsup (2016), I began to conceptualize musical independence in terms of how teachers help students develop skills, dispositions, and agency to become active decision-makers in music ensembles.

Conceptualizing Musical Independence

Scholars and practitioners alike have long considered what it might mean to foster musical independence. In an essay titled "Toward Musical Independence" (1969), Thomas Regelski advocated for a collaborative approach to music learning that centered student discovery through the guidance of a teacher acting as facilitator. He also took aim at traditional conceptions of the school music ensemble, considering it "an area that affords little opportunity

for later participation…in adult [musical] life" (p. 78). Instead, Regelski envisioned music ensembles as a "laboratory class" (p. 81) that allowed students to try out new concepts through chamber ensembles and discuss music through critical listening across a wide array of genres and media.

Stamer (2002) posited that musically independent choral students are able to select their own music to learn, analyze and interpret the music, rehearse the music, and then present the music in a performance setting, all without the aid of a teacher. Like Regelski, Stamer recommended music teachers create small ensembles from the larger group that would work independently to prepare music for performance. By arranging students in small groups, he argued, individual students have more responsibility and ownership of the performance process, gaining skills to engage in performance without the aid of the teacher.

Although these notions of musical independence point toward students developing skills to (re)create music on their own, it is significant that neither recommend students participate in creative activities such as composition or improvisation within their ensembles. Additionally, both scholars failed to consider a student's disposition to willfully engage in musical activities on their own. Regelski and Stamers' definitions distilled musical independence into a set of skills and activities that ensemble directors desire for their students, not what students may desire for themselves.

Shieh and Allsup (2016) adopted a broader vision for musical independence that not only encompassed the skills and proficiencies within given musical traditions but also included agency for students to choose their own musical goals and projects. They envisioned school music ensembles as a type of collective in which students work together toward shared goals but maintain their ability to pursue independent musical exploration. Shieh and Allsup described

collectives as flexible music classrooms in which teachers provide students with large-ensemble music making experiences and create opportunities for them to engage in small group projects. This type of micro and macro approach to learning can be thought of as a simulacrum of civic life in a pluralistic democratic society—a place where citizens are free to pursue their own interests within a culture that values working toward something larger than the individuals themselves.

Additionally, a model of musical independence should provide students with musical encounters in a variety of genres and styles, and transmit musical ideas through multiple modalities, including learning music by ear and through the use of symbolic notation. To attend to the needs of a diverse and pluralistic society such as the US, these modes of musicality must be considered in a culturally sensitive and inclusive way. In US music education spaces, Western European classical music is the most studied form of music, with some researchers reporting that 92% of a music education major's time is spent studying and playing Western classical art music (Wang & Humphreys, 2009). Indeed, access to post-secondary music study has typically been extended only to those who are proficient in White, Western European notions of musicality (Koza, 2009). Embedded Whiteness in all levels of music education has the potential to limit scholarship (McCall, 2017) and prevent transformative action that would promote more inclusive musical spaces (Bradley, 2007). The rehearsal model of instruction that pervades the ensemble paradigm (Bartel, 2001) is steeped in Western European norms, with notational literacy standing unchallenged as the dominant mode of information and cultural transmission (Hess, 2021). A culturally sensitive model for musical independence must challenge this hegemony by disrupting hierarchical notions of musicality that privilege only one tradition of musical knowledge.

Building musical independence must include developing skills and competencies within varied musical traditions so that students have the tools to access those experiences. By developing a broad set of musical skills, musically independent students can seek out ways of engaging in musical activities of their own choosing. With this goal in mind, scholars investigating musical independence must also consider student dispositions toward learning and examine student agency to pursue musical experiences that they find meaningful. By adopting a model for musical independence that considers the desires and curiosities of students, music teachers can embrace an emancipatory vision for choral music education that frees students to explore music across a lifetime of varied musical experiences. A framework that broadens the scope of what it means to be musical may encourage more students toward lifelong musicianship.

It should be noted that creating a framework for musical independence raises questions about the defining components of the construct and for whom those components hold meaning. For example, choir teachers may view musical independence primarily as a set of skills that help students become competent ensemble members able to engage in musical tasks on their own. Student perceptions of musical independence may be more focused on agential power, such as enjoying the freedom to study the music of their choosing. Thus, a framework for musical independence must consider the motivations of individual agents and how their differing perceptions may impact how researchers understand and define the phenomenon.

Choirs as Sites for Building Musical Independence

I contend that music ensembles, specifically choirs, can be places where students grow to become independent, lifelong music learners. In staking out my position, it is not my intention to lessen the contributions of Kratus (2007), Williams (2011), and others who offer promising

opportunities for music education to expand and meet the needs of learners outside of large

ensembles. Rather, I seek ways for choir teachers to transcend the limitations of the rehearsal

model (Bartel, 2001) and provide space for students to grow into independent music learners.

Following Shieh and Allsup (2016), I believe that choral teachers can imagine spaces that

support individual musical agency and still work collaboratively to perform as a large ensemble.

In this dissertation, I explored ways teachers attempt to find curricular balance between group

and individual goals and how students become musically independent with the help of their

teachers. In order to expose underlying mechanisms that affect decisions and processes involved

in music teaching and learning, it is valuable to investigate relationships that exist between

change agents and enduring structures within music education.

Theoretical Frame: Critical Realism

Critical realism seeks explanations for observed phenomena by focusing on the decisions

and actions of people within their social contexts. I chose a critical realist framework to examine

the relationship between structures (i.e., the rehearsal model) and agents (i.e., teachers and

students) and how these interactions may impact music teaching practices and student learning.

Until now, music education researchers have not used critical realism (CR) as a theoretical

framework for empirical research. In the following section, I outlined the tenets of critical

realism and highlighted how it has been used in social science research. I then applied the

theoretical principles of CR to music teaching in ensembles to envision ways of better

understanding how social contexts may affect how teachers make instructional decisions and

impact the learning processes of students.

A Brief Overview of Critical Realism

Critical realism, conceived by Roy Bhaskar (1975/2008) and extended by others (Archer, 1995; Collier, 1994; Gorski, 2013; Sayer, 1992; Scott, 2010), began as a philosophy of natural science. First published in 1975, Bhaskar's *A Realist Theory of Science* (henceforth RTS) outlined a philosophical position squarely between the established traditions of Hume's classical empiricism and Kant's transcendental idealism. In Bhaskar's critical realism, there is a clear ontological distinction between the real world and the observable world. Furthermore, CR asserts that there is in fact a real world that exists beyond human ideation. To a critical realist,

> the objects of [scientific] knowledge [are] the structures and mechanisms that generate phenomena…These objects are neither phenomena (empiricism) nor human constructs imposed upon the phenomena (idealism), but real structures which endure and operate independently of our knowledge, our experience and the conditions which allow us access to them (Bhaskar, 1975/2008, p. 15).

Accordingly, critical realists believe the role of science is to seek explanations for the real causes of observed events.

Another important principle of critical realism is the distinct separation between ontology and epistemology. According to Bhaskar, what people know about the world (epistemology) is constructed by their experiences and observations of phenomena, but the true natural world (ontology) exists outside of human perception and is controlled by invisible "generative mechanisms of nature" (1975/2008, p. 3). By establishing a definitive break between ontology and epistemology, Bhaskar avoided what he called the epistemic fallacy, Western philosophy's tendency to conflate what is real with what is known.

As scientists study phenomena, they are observing the outcomes of enduring processes that remain unseen. In critical realism, reality is like an iceberg: what humans know (the observable) is but the tip of the iceberg. The mechanisms and events that cause observed experiences lie unseen beneath the surface. Critical realist inquiry seeks to uncover these underlying mechanisms by making inferences from data collected within the context of the phenomenon being studied.

Critical Realism in Social Science

Building upon his philosophy of natural science, Bhaskar sought to apply critical realist theory to the field of social science in his 1979 work, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (henceforth, PN). First, he posited that society was neither collectivist—entirely controlled by social structures, nor individualist—consisting solely of the actions of agents. Following the ontology of the natural world outlined in RTS, Bhaskar theorized that there is an independent social world that consists of more than just human ideation. He asserted that beneath the surface of reality are underlying preexisting social structures that provide the material cause of human action. However, Bhaskar argued, these structures would not exist without people; they are either reproduced or transformed by human activity. Society then, consists of the enduring relations between people (agents) and the social structures that they inhabit:

> People do not create society [f]or it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices, and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so (Bhaskar, 1979/2015, p. 36).

This dynamic relationship between structure and agency constitutes Bhaskar's transformational model of social activity (Bhaskar, 1979/2015, p. 25), his framework for studying social relations.

Critical realism's unique perspective on structure and agency stands apart from other prominent philosophical traditions which grant primacy to one entity or the other. British sociologist Margaret Archer (1995) described the problematic nature of dualist conceptions of structure and agency in her frequently cited discussion of conflation. To Archer, society is defined by three unique features: (1) it is inseparable from people because it is dependent upon human activity, (2) it is transformable and defined by what people do and the consequences of their actions, and (3) it has profound effects upon what humans do and how they attempt to transform it. Structure and agency exist as separate entities and are equal determinant factors in shaping social reality. Thus, theories that assign precedence to one entity or the other commit misattributions of cause that Archer called conflation. Upward conflation prioritizes the influence of the individual and claims that society can be described by the actions and traits of individual social actors. Downward conflation promotes a collectivist argument, holding that individuals are "'indeterminate material' which is unilaterally moulded[1] by society" (1995, p. 3). A third misappropriation, central conflation, occurs when structure and agency are co-constituted, disallowing distinctions between the unique properties of structures and agents and disabling analysis of how the two interact together.

Intersections of Structure and Agency in School Choirs

The dynamic relationship between structures and the actions of agents is a useful framework for describing the ontology of choral ensembles. Choirs are preexisting structures constructed by agents whose actions either reproduce established paradigms or transform them into new entities. For example, the rehearsal model of choir I discussed previously is a preexisting structure with many defining attributes. School choirs are typically led by a

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[1] Margaret Archer was a British sociologist and philosopher. I retained British spellings when quoting her works.

conductor who helps the singers learn music from notated scores in preparation for a public performance. During the performance, the conductor stands in front of the ensemble and solicits a presentation of musical material by means of evocative hand gestures which the choir has been taught to interpret in a uniform way. Unless there are specific moments that feature a soloist, individualistic expression is discouraged in favor of ensemble blend and balance. These conventions and practices are then reified by the pedagogical practices of school choir teachers and music teacher educators who privilege particular repertoires, modes of knowledge transmission, and forms of artistic expression inherent in the rehearsal model. In this way, the rehearsal model exerts material influence on the actions of choir teachers and students by shaping their perceptions of what a choir *is*.

I argue that the ontology of choir described above has the potential to shape how choir teachers view musical independence. When success in choir is only measured by judging final renditions of previously composed music, choir teachers may place greater value on skills that efficiently lead choirs to meet pre-determined aesthetic goals. Specifically, teachers who favor traditional choir pedagogies are more likely to prioritize teaching their students skills such as notational music literacy, ensemble blend, and accurate intonation than more creative abilities such as improvisation and composition.

For teachers to imagine music learning environments that transcend the established paradigm of the large ensemble rehearsal model, they must possess agential power to overcome structures that are resistant to change. Critical realism provides a framework for identifying underlying structures that may enable or constrain human agency. Scott (2010) outlined a model consisting of five different structures that exist in educational settings: embodied objects, social discourses, modes of agency, institutional and systemic forms, and social markers. Although

Scott included modes of agency as a structural consideration, I chose to include modes of agency with other components of agency that consider ways individuals mediate structural constraints and affordances. Each intersects with agency in a specific way and has potential implications for pedagogical practices in choir, which I describe in the following sections.

Embodied Objects

For Scott (2010), embodied objects are restrictive impediments with material effects. They are physical barriers that can be overcome but only through the deconstructive efforts of agents. Scott likened embodied objects to the presence of a wall—one cannot simply walk through it. To move through an embodied object, an agent must knock down the wall, "transforming the site of activity, which allows a different range of activities to take place" (p. 97). In a choral music classroom, embodied objects may be visible structures in the learning space such as choral risers, notated scores, and podium-centered seating formations. Other embodied objects, such as public performance expectations and pressure to compete may be less tangible but still causally efficacious structures.

Past researchers have examined how public performance expectations may influence how music teachers make educational decisions (Haning, 2021; Russell & Austin, 2010), while pressure to compete in organized festivals can restrict repertoire choices and limit opportunities for student creativity (Kratus, 2019). In my own lived experience and from my observations of other choir teachers, most instructional time is spent preparing for public performance and repertoire decisions are often driven by required lists instead of student interest. High stakes performances in hyper-competitive environments (Powell, 2021) can lead ensemble music teachers to structure their curriculum in a way that prioritizes success in competition over other learning goals. This usually means teachers select music and rehearsal strategies that conform to

Western European aesthetic ideals and performance practices. Through a critical realist lens, concerts and festivals constitute physical objects that impact the educational decisions of choir teachers. If ensemble performance quality is the primary driver of curriculum, choir teachers may feel compelled to use most or all their instructional time engaged in group rehearsal. This is turn can limit the opportunities for choir learners to exercise their agency and pursue their own musical projects. A tradition of competitive success may further enhance community expectations for concerts that conform to Western European aesthetic ideals, reifying a curriculum designed only to produce quality reproductions of previously composed music. By imposing restrictive norms upon how choir is taught and what curricular outcomes are pursued, high-stakes music competitions and public performances may serve as embodied objects that constrain agency for choir teachers and learners in secondary choral ensembles.

Social Discourses

The ideas, values, and narratives that influence an agent's actions are known as social discourses (Scott, 2010). Bratman (2001) refers to these discourses as forms of "subjective normative authority," and considers them in opposition to an agent's personal desires. As such, these discourses should be understood as preexisting conditions that influence the actions of agents. Another way of thinking of subjective normative authority is that it constitutes the unspoken rules by which society judges how an agent behaves. In choral music education, normative social discourses can be theories, ideas, and attitudes about music teaching and learning. These ideas are found in repertoires, methodologies, pedagogies, and other normative ideas about music education. Scott (2010) contended that when agents act in a way that is out of sync with normative social discourses they may be met with sanctions or punishments for their actions. However, he also stated that the non-normative actions of agents can eventually lead to

changes in social discourses. The prevalence of the rehearsal model in secondary choral education spaces is an example of a normative social discourse in choral music education that may affect teacher agency. Choir teachers who resist the rehearsal model in favor of other curricular objectives may find themselves in conflict with the social discourses of school music associations. Alternatively, agents may be successful in their efforts to adopt new pedagogies in choir, which may bring changes to the rehearsal model over time. This agential momentum could then lead to other forms of structural change, such as altered concert formats and greater collaboration between teachers and students in ensemble learning spaces.

Choir learners may also be affected by social discourses. Theories of music learning that emphasize notational literacy over other modes of musical knowledge may impact what skills students learn in choir classrooms. Students who are accustomed to learning music through oral transmission could become frustrated by notation-centric instruction and lose interest. Other students may buy into the normative discourses advanced by their teacher, defending traditions and practices that exclude other ways of being musical. In this way, social discourses have the capacity to make students resistant to change and encourage them to be enforcers of the status quo.

Institutional and Systemic Structures

Institutional and systemic structures encompass the social values, norms, and expectations where agents are at work (Scott, 2010). They consist of systems of rewards and sanctions, hierarchies and power relations, and access to institutional resources. In school music programs, institutional structures may include administrative policies, state music organizations, parent booster groups, and department expectations. These entities can act in ways that support teacher agency, or they can apply pressure upon agents to conform with institutional

expectations. For example, one potential constraint upon choir teacher agency may come from school or community stakeholders pressuring teachers into taking their choirs to competitive festivals run by state music organizations.

Students may also be affected by institutional and systemic structures in choral settings. State-sanctioned repertoire lists may limit the types of choral music that students learn in choir. Other institutional norms govern access to systems of rewards such as state and regional honor choirs and recognition at state music festivals. These institutions typically recognize students with musical skills such as sight-singing and bel canto vocal technique. Students who diverge from these systemic expectations may be met with sanctions, such as being denied acceptance into honor choirs, or receiving low marks at adjudicated festivals. These types of exclusion may also occur in how institutions determine which students are accepted into post-secondary music programs (Koza, 2009). Institutional structures may even affect students' access to their high school choirs when teachers impose strict audition requirements just to participate.

Social Markers

Race, gender, and class are part of an agent's identity and can potentially impact the way they are treated within structures and affect the resources that may be available to them (Scott, 2010). In choral music education spaces, social markers[2] could affect a choir teacher's decision-making in a myriad of ways. The cultural and gender identity of students in their choirs may influence a teacher's repertoire decisions and potentially open new avenues for musical exploration. Social markers could also potentially constrain agency in places where inequitable access to resources and harmful racial and gender stereotypes may limit the musical opportunities of teachers and students.

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[2] It is important to note that Scott's use of the term social marker refers to how institutions treat individuals in ways that are relational to their social identities, not as material constructs for the use of labeling.

Through Scott's ontological framework of structures, researchers can begin to identify possible underlying social mechanisms that may constrain human agency in educational settings. Scholars should not construe this framework as a collection of qualitative codes, but as a theoretical device to begin to conceptualize potential structures that might hinder or support pedagogical practices that prioritize building musical independence. My theoretical applications of Scott's typology to choir detailed possible impacts upon teaching practices and explored possible effects upon student agency and learning processes. As I explain in Chapter 3, critical realist methodology uses retroduction to propose possible explanations for observed events. Scott's typology is useful in building a theoretical foundation upon which to make these propositions

Modes of Agency

Scott (2010) called discursive and material influences which may impact an agent's potential to act *modes of agency*. They invoke an agent's image of self (Scott, 2010, p. 100) and mediate the relationship between agents and the structures they inhabit. Modes of agency may be linked to notions of personal identity and self-efficacy and affect an agent's willingness to challenge established norms. In music learning spaces, tensions between performer identity and teacher identity (Pellegrino, 2009) may further complicate how a teacher exercises agency in making instructional decisions.

Modes of agency are also useful for describing the ways students negotiate the discursive boundaries that define the roles of ensemble members. Being a part of a group working together toward a shared goal does not always mean that group members exert equal effort. Some students in cooperative learning environments display a type of free-rider behavior (Joyce, 1999) in which they do not participate at a level commensurate with their abilities. Other students may

be more inclined to take musical risks in choir, such as singing by themselves in front of others or auditioning for a solo. Previous researchers have suggested that high levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) may be associated with high levels of musical achievement (McCormick & McPherson, 2003; McPherson & McCormick, 2000, 2006). It may be that by taking more risks, highly self-efficacious choir students allow themselves more opportunities to develop skills and make musical decisions. Examining how students enact modes of agency in their music learning may provide insight into the internal processes of acquiring musical independence.

Reflexivity

Another way that agents mediate structural constraints is through reflexivity (Archer, 2007). While they are not determinative, structures can "strongly condition what type of social actor the vast majority can and do become" (Archer, 1995, p. 278). Reflexivity allows agents to see themselves as autonomous individuals distinct from the structures they inhabit. According to Archer, reflexivity is "the regular exercise of the mental ability…[of agents] to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (p. 4). Individuals who are largely shaped by their environments may exhibit low levels of reflexivity while those with high levels of reflexivity shape their own norms, values, and desires. In this way, Archer's model of reflexivity avoids both an individualistic notion of people wholly unaffected by society, and a deterministic view that people are fully conditioned by social structures.

Reflexivity may be an important consideration in how music teachers make instructional decisions that bring about pedagogical change. Music teachers with low levels of reflexivity may feel compelled to follow professional norms to gain acceptance from their peers and be more likely to conform with traditional modes of teaching. Conversely, highly reflexive music teachers

may be less affected by social and contextual norms and be driven to pursue their own instructional ideas and curricular goals.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described my interest in the concept of musical independence, related it to my personal experience as a choir teacher, and explained how it might be understood as a complex system of interrelated skills, dispositions, and agency. Then I introduced my theoretical framework, critical realism, and explained how scholars have used it to explore the intersection of structure and agency in the social world. I closed the chapter by explaining how music education scholars might use critical realism to investigate structures in choral music education that may enable or constrain the teaching and learning of musical independence.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

In this dissertation, I explore the contextual factors and pedagogical decisions of choir teachers who cite musical independence (MI) as a curricular goal. Additionally, I interrogate the construct of musical independence and consider how students describe learning processes associated with acquiring it. With these goals in mind, in this chapter I review literature from three streams. In the first stream, I synthesize general education theories of learning to create a conceptual framework for MI. Then, in the second stream, I discuss empirical studies of MI in ensemble settings, including their theoretical framing, to advance my conceptual framework for MI. In the final stream, I review scholarship that explored the intersection of structure and agency in how teachers make pedagogical decisions.

Learner Independence

Learner independence specifically refers to a student's ability to *learn to learn*, a necessary component of lifelong learning. While contemporary research into learner independence can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s (Knowles, 1975; Rogers & Freiberg, 1970), scholars showed renewed interest in the topic at the turn of the millennium (Carr & Claxton, 2002; Cornford, 2002; eakin Crick, 2007). Policy makers and scholars promoted learner independence as a "means of overcoming the problems being faced in an age of uncertainty where the two seeming constants are continuing change and growth in bodies of knowledge" (Cornford, 2002, p. 357).

Describing the salient features of learner independence required an exhaustive review of extant literature. It also necessitated a careful disentangling of related concepts to arrive at a list of separate and unique dimensions. After extensive reading, I identified three key internal

processes that promote learner independence: learner skills and competencies, learner dispositions, and learner agency. An important ancillary factor, learning context, can enable or inhibit student development in any of these three processes. I illustrated the dynamic interrelationship of learning processes and context in Figure 1. In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss each of the three internal learning processes and highlight how contextual factors external to the learner may influence each process.

Figure 1

Visual Model for Learner Independence
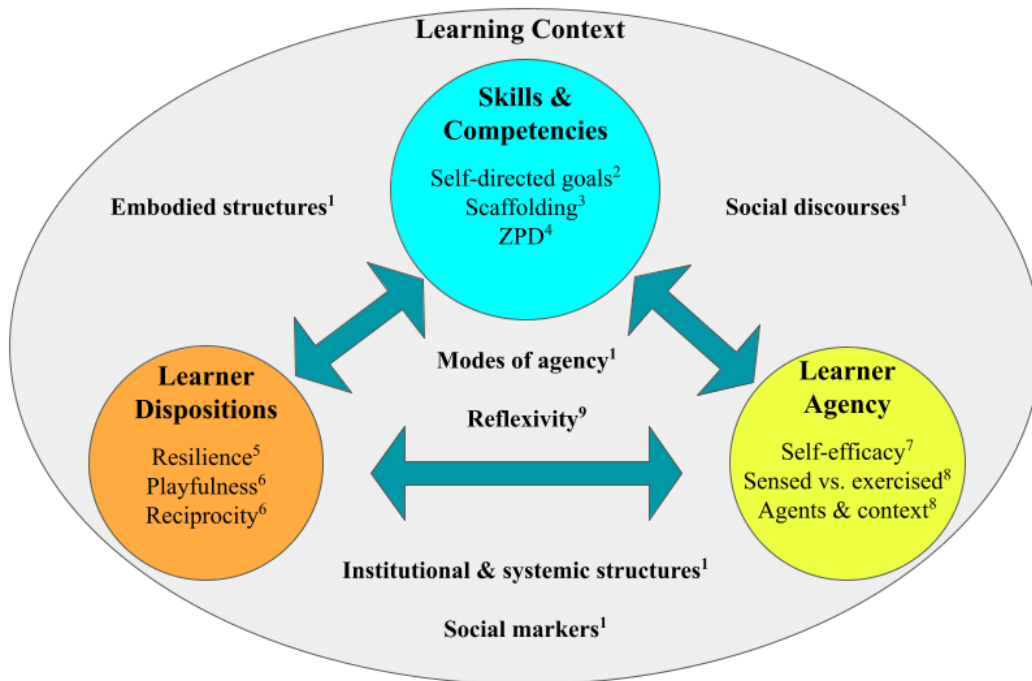
[1] Scott, 2010; [2] Knowles, 1975; [3] Wood et al., 1976 ; [4] Vygotsky, 1978; [5] Dweck, 1999; [6] Carr & Claxton, 2002; [7] Bandura, 1997; [8] Mercer, 2011; [9] Archer, 2007

Developing Skills and Competencies

In order to independently complete a learning task, one must be able to *do* discrete and tangible things. To tie my shoes, for example, I must be able to cross the laces, pull them taut, and finish the process with some type of knot. The type of knot I choose, however, can be widely

varied and still result in shoelaces that remain tied. Similarly, there are multiple ways of solving mathematical equations, devising scientific experiments, and harmonizing bass lines. For this reason, I resisted creating a list of specific skills and competencies for learner independence. Instead, I chose to highlight ways that learners develop the skills and competencies that may lead to learner independence. To illustrate this process, I focused this section of the literature review on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and Malcom Knowles (1975). I chose to put these two learning theorists in conversation because of how they each conceptualized the ways students learn in groups, an essential dynamic in choral educational settings. Both envisioned a gradual transfer of learning responsibility from teacher to learner through meaningful social interactions. The social element of learning Vygotsky and Knowles emphasized may be particularly valuable to understanding how learners develop skills associated with musical independence in choirs.

Vygotsky posited that learning originates in social interactions and is inextricably bound to the context in which it occurs. This is the central tenet of social constructivism, Vygotsky's foundational learning theory. According to Vygotsky (1978):

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. (p. 57)

Learners acquire knowledge through a collaborative process in which they develop new skills with the guidance of teachers or more capable peers, moving from a level of actual development towards their potential. Vygotsky identified this target potential as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), a level of competence that is just above what the student already has

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attained. Key to understanding the ZPD is the role of imitation in learning. Contrary to the tenets of classical psychology, Vygotsky asserted that imitation can be a marker of a child's cognitive development. Using the example of mathematics, Vygotsky argued that while a student could easily understand a teacher's demonstration of a simple arithmetic problem by imitation, no number of repetitions would help the student understand mathematic functions beyond the learner's ZPD (1978, p. 88). Similarly, a music student may hear countless repetitions of a complex pitch set, but if it is too far beyond the learner's ZPD, it will be inaccessible to them through imitation. In other words, what a student is capable of imitating can be an indication of their ability level.

Learners move toward higher levels of development through the help of a knowledgeable other. According to Vygotsky (1978), this knowledgeable other may be anyone in society—a sibling, mentor, teacher, or peer—who is able to provide support for the learner as they attempt new skills. Wood et al. (1976) described these temporary learning supports as scaffolds. As the learner gradually becomes more proficient, a knowledgeable other can begin to remove scaffolds so that the student can function independently. Additionally, teachers can create learning environments in which peers (more knowledgeable others) support the learner in refining skills, gradually moving toward independence. Stone (1993) conceptualized scaffolding as a dialogue between teacher and student, building common understanding or *intersubjectivity* through meaningful exchanges. It is important to note that Stone's concept of scaffolding casts the learner as an active participant, engaging in communication with a more knowledgeable mentor to advance understanding. This view of learning is consistent with social constructivism, in which Vygotsky maintained that learners develop "only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (1978, p. 90).

A leader in the field of adult education, Knowles offered an early model of independent learning in his foundational text, *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers* (1975). His work stressed that learning on one's own was a "basic human competence" necessary for living in a rapidly changing world (p. 17). Knowles defined the concept of self-directed learning (SDL) as:

> a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (p. 18).

Knowles viewed these skills as necessary competencies for self-directed learning. Additionally, he emphasized that learners must be able to understand and articulate the differences between SDL and teacher-directed learning (TDL). According to Knowles, TDL is characterized by a content-focused *pedagogy* (teaching children) that views the learner as dependent upon the expert knowledge of the teacher. Conversely, SDL is guided by a task or problem-centered *andragogy* (teaching maturing human beings) that centers learners as developing, self-directed entities motivated by curiosity (Knowles, 1975, p. 60). While there may be instances when learners require a teacher-directed approach, such as with a new concept for which prior experience is of little use, a self-directed learner will approach those opportunities as resources for learning without losing their self-directedness.

Regarding the context in which students develop SDL, Knowles outlined how teachers should aim to function more as facilitators of learning instead of purely as content transmitters. To do so, Knowles suggested teachers create a climate in which students view each other as "mutual resources for learning" instead of competitors (p. 34) and see teachers as facilitators

instead of authority figures. SDL facilitators also must carefully consider how to involve students in the decision-making process and how to co-construct learning goals and assess outcomes. In this new role, teachers are still intimately involved in the process of learning, even to the point of providing content transmission if learners desire it.

Learner Dispositions

A second process involved in learner independence is the development of learner dispositions. Research into learner dispositions revealed a learning process that is contrasting to but interrelated with how students develop skills and competencies. Katz (1988) referred to dispositions as "habits of mind, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways" (p. 30). Perkins (1995) defined dispositions as "the proclivities that lead us in one direction rather than another, within the freedom that we have" (p. 275). Carr and Claxton (2002) sought to operationalize learning dispositions as observable and assessable processes of learning. They envisioned learner disposition as a dimension of "learning power" (Claxton, 1999), a term the authors used to describe an individual's ability to learn to learn. Further, they defined dispositions as something learners develop and viewed them as qualities that could be refined through observation and assessment.

Carr and Claxton (2002) identified three learning dispositions critical to building lifelong learners. The first disposition they explored was *resilience,* or the "inclination to take on…learning challenges where the outcome is uncertain, to persist with learning despite temporary confusion or frustration, and to recover from setbacks or failures" (p. 14). Drawing upon the work of Dweck (1999), Carr and Claxton viewed resilience as directly related to learner beliefs, or mindsets. Dweck's work characterized two contrasting learner mindsets: fixed and growth. In a fixed mindset, learners believe their ability to perform a skill is directly related to

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their innate ability. Alternatively, growth mindset learners believe that effort and hard work can strengthen "learning muscles" (Dweck, 1999) that will help them acquire new skills. Fixed mindset learners, then, are less likely to demonstrate resilience and more likely to become frustrated and defensive when confronted with a challenging task. Accordingly, Carr and Claxton (2002) listed key indicators (high frustration tolerance, fast recovery from setbacks, ability to stick with difficult tasks) that teachers can look for and encourage in their students to help them build resilience.

Carr and Claxton (2002) cited *playfulness* as the second of the three key learning dispositions. The authors identified three dimensions within playfulness: mindfulness, imagination, and experimentation. Mindfulness refers to an openness to perceive new situations as opportunities for learning and acquiring new perspectives. The opposite quality, mindlessness, is marked by learners rigidly adhering to familiar learning paradigms and failing to see new and potentially meaningful details. Carr and Claxton described imagination as "the inclination to generate alternative inner scenarios and fantasies to draw on different analogies and spot unlikely connections" (p. 14). This trait helps learners see beyond the literal truth of a situation and conceive new possibilities. Finally, experimentation involves learners playing with and exploring materials to discover new properties and possibilities. Experimentation often occurs without a clear goal in place, allowing the learner to pursue emergent goals and purposes. The three dimensions of playfulness also serve as indicators that provide teachers with a means of assessing disposition development.

The third disposition Carr and Claxton described was *reciprocity.* To the authors, reciprocity is firmly rooted in social constructivist approaches to learning (Vygotsky, 1978) and refers to the proclivity of learners to interact with others in learning situations. It is interesting to

note that Knowles (1975) included "identifying human…resources for learning" (p. 18) as a *competency*, or skill necessary to acquire learner independence while Carr and Claxton (2002) identified it as a disposition. I propose that this is not a redundancy but an important example of interrelatedness. It is practical to conceive of reciprocity as both a necessary competency and a valuable disposition because the ability to do something is a distinctly different concept than the willingness to engage in it. For instance, a student may be eager to interact with other learners, but if their skills are mismatched with their learning community they may not benefit from the exchange. Applied to music learning in ensembles, this scenario could unfold in two ways—one when a student is denied admittance into an ensemble because they did not meet audition requirements, another when their skills are more advanced than those of their peers. It is also possible that individuals may understand how they can access the learning potential of communities but are unwilling to do so. Applying this case to music ensemble education, a student who is capable of a high level of musicianship may be disinclined to participate because they do not identify with the repertoire of music being studied, or they are not willing to capitulate to teacher-centric rehearsal practices (O'Toole, 2005). Just because a learner has the capacity to do something does not guarantee that they will act upon that ability.

Carr and Claxton (2002) recognized the importance of context in actualizing learner dispositions. A teacher's ability to manage a learning environment may enable or inhibit an individual's willingness to act upon any of the key dispositions identified above. Learners who do not feel supported or safe in their learning environment are unlikely to take risks, especially regarding playfulness and reciprocity. Potential threats to learner safety may arise when tasks are challenging or when learners do not trust that the leader can successfully facilitate the activity (Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt, 2018).

To optimize learning opportunities and unlock "learning power" (Claxton, 1999), Carr and Claxton proposed a systemized means of tracking how students develop positive dispositions to learning. They advocated for assessing developing dispositions across the course of an educational program to help shift stakeholder emphasis from outcomes and achievement toward a more productive appraisal of learning. Through a system of observation, external review, and learner self-reports, Carr and Claxton envisioned a structured method of monitoring and remediating the contextual and internal components of learner dispositions.

Learner Agency

The third process involved in my model of learner independence is *learner agency*. Like the aforementioned processes of developing skills and competencies and learner dispositions, agency is both a distinct and interrelated element of learner independence. Scholars describing agency often employ overlapping frameworks, which create challenges when defining its characteristics. Broadly speaking, learner agency refers to how an individual prioritizes learning goals and outcomes as well as the freedom to engage in intentional acts to realize them. To identify some of the defining features of agency, I briefly examine Bandura's model of emergent interactive agency (1999).

Bandura viewed agents as neither completely autonomous nor controlled by their environment. People generate thoughts in both reactive and determinative ways; they think in response to environmental cues and in ways that shape how they experience their environments. While the societal structure that agents negotiate is largely outside of their control, people construct actual experienced environments by choosing whom to associate with and what activities they engage in. Bandura described this agentive model as a system of triadic reciprocal causation, comprised of three mutually influential variables: (1) personal characteristics, (2)

behavior, and (3) environment (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). Bandura's description underscores the interaction of personal attributes and contextual factors, allowing for internal and external processes to shape an individual's sense of agency.

Along with his system of triadic reciprocal causation, Bandura's notion of agency is further mediated by an individual's level of *self-efficacy,* the belief in one's capability to perform a given action (Bandura, 1997). Put simply, individuals are likely to attempt things they think they can accomplish and avoid tasks they think they cannot. Applied to educational settings, learners bolstered by a sense of competence or skill are more likely to attempt learning tasks than those with low levels of self-efficacy.

Drawing upon Bandura, Mercer (2011) conceptualized learner agency as a "complex dynamic system" (p. 431) in which both a learner's *sense* and *exercise* of agency is affected by interrelated factors. She identified learner self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), mindset (Dweck, 1999), and learning context as components of an interactive system of affordances or inhibitions that impel or thwart learner agency. Mercer's distinction between sense and exercise of agency is an important one. Being aware of one's agentive capacity does not guarantee that an individual will act to exercise that agency. However, in my synthesis of literature, I found Mercer's definition of *exercise* of agency analogous to what I have already described as *learner disposition.* Exercise of agency is related to a learner's ability to persist in difficult learning tasks and is associated with a resilient mindset (Dweck, 1999). This commonality exemplifies the interrelated nature of the constructs under investigation and highlights the challenge in disentangling them from one another.

Mercer also recognized the influence of context upon the learner and, potentially, learner upon context. Mercer situated this understanding within a critical realist framework to account

for the reciprocal relationship between agents (students) and structure (formalized education programs):

> The importance of such a view is that it sees humans as agents able to influence their contexts, rather than just react to them, in a relationship of ongoing reciprocal causality in which the emphasis is on the complex dynamic interaction between the two elements (p. 428).

By acknowledging a reciprocal relationship between learners and educational structures, Mercer deployed critical realism in a way that both shines a light on restrictive classroom practices and impels students to act in advancing their intellectual interests.

In the course of this literature review, I encountered scholars using both the terms student-centered learning and democratic practices to describe learning environments that encourage student agency. To assist the reader in differentiating between these two ideas, I offer brief descriptions of each below, and relate them to the concept of agency.

Student-centered learning is a broad term referring to educational contexts that allow individual students to determine learning goals, ways of learning, or both the learning goals and means of learning (Land et al, 2012). As such, student-centered learning environments tend to be highly individualized, granting students the autonomy to pursue their educational interests in the manner of their choosing.

Derived from the writings of Dewey (1916), democratic teaching practices include not just the element of student choice, but student responsibility to their peers, and a balanced power distribution between the teacher and students in the classroom. Because democratic teaching practices tend to focus upon forming consensus among a community of learners, they may not

result in the same type of individualized learning environments present in student-centered settings.

A Framework for Learner Independence

Learner independence consists of a complex system of interrelated processes that include (1) competencies and skills, (2) learner dispositions, and (3) learner agency. Bruner (1996) pointed to connections between agency and skill, stating, "Since agency implies not only the capacity for initiating, but also for completing our acts, it also implies skills or know-how" (p. 36). Put another way, without some form of skills and knowledge, agents are limited in their capacity to act. Further, agency is critically linked to learner dispositions. Without the impetus to act (agency), and resilience to persevere through challenges (disposition), it is unlikely that learners will develop a given skill. In summary, skills and competencies are what learners can *do*, dispositions represent students' *attitudes* toward learning, and agency is the level of *control* learners exercise in their own education. It is the interaction of these three fundamental attributes that form the internal processes of learner independence.

In addition to these interlocking internal processes, a learner is situated within a context that simultaneously exerts external influence and is influenced by the learner (Bandura, 1989; Mercer, 2011). Bruner (1996) stated, "Just as important as the inner psychodynamics of selfhood are the ways in which a culture institutionalizes it" (p. 36). Learners can develop skills and competencies through meaningful engagement with learning goals that are co-constructed with their teachers (Knowles, 1975). Teachers can help students develop positive dispositions toward learning and monitor their growth Carr & Claxton, 2002), as well as create affordances for learning by fostering an affective climate that supports learner agency (Mercer, 2011). Applying critical realist principles of reciprocal causality between agency and structure, I propose learner

independence as a complex system comprised of agents' internal processes (skills and competencies, dispositions, and agency) that act upon and are influenced by the external processes of the learning context in which they are situated.

Models of Musical Independence

Scholars have offered theories of musical independence that consider the cognitive processes and contextual influences involved in music learning. Wiggins (2001) promoted a model for musical understanding with the goal of "empower[ing] students so that they can become musically proficient and, eventually, musically independent of their teachers" (p. 3). Musical understanding, according to Wiggins, involves acquiring literacy skills, which she defined as "the ability to understand a wide variety of music as it occurs within a broad range of contexts" (p. 3). Additionally, she asserted that musical understanding includes knowing how to use music as a means of personal expression—"knowing enough about music to value it in one's life" (p. 3). This dimension of musical understanding is particularly important in choral music settings which often center styles of music that students may not otherwise encounter in their daily lives.

Wiggins (2001) explained a learner's internal cognitive processes through Piaget's schema theory (Piaget, 1954) in which interactive networks of ideas sourced from a learner's life experiences guide them to accept new information and direct their actions in learning. She also stressed the importance of the social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978) in music learning settings, and advocated for lessons to be designed so that individuals of varying levels of expertise can participate and learn within the same experience. To account for both the way that learners construct knowledge (schema theory) and learn through interactions with others (social constructivism), Wiggins suggested music teachers design learning experiences through

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cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al, 1991), which is comprised of the following characteristics:

(1) Learners need to engage in real-life, problem-solving situations.

(2) Learning situations must be holistic in nature.

(3) Learners need opportunities to interact directly with subject matter.

(4) Learners need to take an active role in their own learning.

(5) Learners need opportunities to work on their own, with peers, and with teacher support, when needed.

(6) Learners need to be cognizant of the goals of the learning situation and their own progress toward goals (Wiggins, 2001, pp. 18–19).

Musical Independence in Ensemble Settings

Wiggins' integration of schema theory, social constructivism, and cognitive apprenticeship to music learning experiences has clear implications for ensemble instructional practices commonly associated with the rehearsal model (Bartel, 2001). Specifically, rehearsal models that are exclusively teacher-directed can deny learners opportunities to take an active role in their own learning, work on their own, or interact directly with the subject matter. Director-centric practices common in concert bands (Allsup & Benedict, 2008), concert choirs (O'Toole, 2005), and orchestras (Scruggs, 2009), may potentially restrict student agency (Kratus, 2007) and prioritize group performance quality over individual student growth (Freer, 2011). Additionally, choir settings may be particularly challenging places to teach skills associated with musical independence because of the tendency of the group to influence how an individual develops musical skill, particularly in tasks like sight-singing (Demorest, 1998). In choirs specifically, it may be that the ability of singers to match pitch nearly instantaneously with others around them

leads to a type of collective problem solving when sight-singing. Learning context and learner processes simply interact differently in ensembles than they do in individual music learning settings, complicating efforts at student-centered approaches. To help disentangle individual learning processes from contextual influences, I reviewed past empirical studies of musical independence in ensemble settings.

Empirical Studies of Musical Independence in Ensembles

My review of the extant literature in large ensembles revealed varied approaches to investigating and describing musical independence (MI). Researchers have proposed differing terms for MI, including democratic teaching practices (Berglin, 2015; Haning, 2019) and student autonomy (Harris, 2017; Schatt, 2022), while others directly used the term musical independence (Nolet, 2007; Weidner, 2015). Although there are salient differences in how the various authors conceptualized MI, each study of MI in ensemble settings included processes of learner independence I highlighted previously—skills and competencies, dispositions, agency, and context. In the following section, I synthesized notable studies of musical independence in ensembles and considered them within my framework for learner independence, taking note of how music education researchers attended to the skills, dispositions, and agency afforded to learners. Then, I reviewed how researchers described factors related to context and learning environment, and examined aspects of methodology and theoretical framing in their studies. I closed this section by introducing my conceptual framework for musical independence in high school choir classrooms.

Musical Skills and Competencies

Numerous scholars have explored MI in relation to how students develop skills and competencies associated with ensemble music-making, particularly in skills related to

performance. Some findings suggested the importance of teacher-directed learning experiences in developing skills and competencies associated with MI. Haning (2019) investigated music learning within student-run collegiate music ensembles. He studied four ensembles from a mid-sized midwestern university and explored the relationship of each group's culture to the participants' music learning. Three groups were entirely student-led, with students responsible for making repertoire decisions, auditioning ensemble members, and leading music rehearsals. The fourth ensemble was governed by students but employed Haning as their music director, allowing him to contrast student experiences in entirely student-led groups with one that had a trained teacher leading instruction. Haning found that the ensembles without a trained music leader often struggled to improve their vocal and choral technique. Conversely, the group for which he served as music director was better able to negotiate technical challenges in their literature and make improvements in their vocal technique. Haning's findings highlighted the value of an experienced music teacher's contributions to student learning in choir. These findings echo Knowles' (1975) assertion that teachers working in self-directed learning paradigms must fluctuate between facilitation and content transmission, alternating between providing opportunities for students to guide their own learning and providing expert instruction.

Nolet (2007) examined metacognitive strategies choir students used to learn a musical excerpt though their existing music literacy and sight-singing skills. Specifically, Nolet investigated how self-regulated learners (Zimmerman and Pons, 1986) applied metacognitive strategies related to self-evaluation, goal setting, and organizing and transforming information. She also observed how learners used music-specific strategies (Killian & Henry, 2005) to decode the musical excerpt without the assistance of a teacher or peers. It may be that metacognitive strategies such as those Nolet explored help music learners develop the skills and self-awareness

to learn music on their own. A notable limitation of her study, however, was that it only examined how individual learners approached a single, isolated excerpt of notated music. It did not explore other dimensions of music making such as improvisation or composition. As such, her definition of musical independence was centered around notational music literacy skills, specifically the ability to learn an excerpt of notated choral music selected by Nolet for the purpose of a research study. Given such a limited scope of inquiry, it is unclear how the skills Nolet studied can be applied to music making beyond sight-singing teacher-selected repertoire in choir.

Bazan (2011) described the teaching practices of middle school band directors who reported a student-centered leadership style. He identified performance skills (technical proficiency, knowledge of music vocabulary, notational literacy) as being the most valued student skills among his participants, with music history and connections with society in general as lesser priorities. Bazan noted, much like Nolet (2007), that his participants tended to encourage students to use metacognitive strategies, asking them to self-assess, evaluate, and think about the processes they used in learning performance skills.

Weidner (2015) examined teaching practices intended to help students develop MI in a traditional wind band. Weidner asserted that the band teacher cultivated an environment directed toward transferring necessary skills and competencies to students so that they could make musical decisions for themselves, creating a "continuum from dependence to independence" (p. 76). Students met weekly in chamber ensembles, playing arrangements that their director chose for them. In their chamber rehearsals, they were responsible for diagnosing music errors, solving musical issues such as pulse and balance, and making musical decisions like phrasing and dynamics. While the chamber rehearsals moved at a slower pace than the large ensemble,

Weidner observed that it was in this space that students could test their abilities. Explicit instruction paired with opportunities for independent musical practice served as a form of cognitive apprenticeship (Brown et al, 1989) in which students employed strategies they learned in the large rehearsal and used rationales they learned from their director to make interpretive decisions. Chamber ensembles provided students with opportunities for leadership and self-direction, skills that may help foster agency and lifelong music making. Although Weidner's study (2015) identified promising practices for shifting responsibility for musical thinking from the teacher to the students, some notable limitations of his study include the lack of opportunities for students to compose, arrange, improvise, or choose their own repertoire.

In another study involving MI, Weidner (2020) examined teaching and learning in three high school bands, observing two bands for an entire academic year and spending a semester with the third. Through semi-structured interviews with teachers and students and observations of classroom instruction, Weidner used constructivist grounded theory to develop a theory of musical independence in instrumental ensembles. Weidner's model consisted of three interrelated educational outcomes involved in musical independence: lifelong/lifewide musicianship, student agency, and critical decision making. Vital to all three outcomes was a foundation of preconditions for musical independence, one of which was a strong background in music fundamentals. The band directors in Weidner's study stressed the importance of tone, intonation, proper technique, rhythmic and note accuracy, and notational literacy as prerequisites for developing musical independence. Weidner acknowledged that these skills may not be necessary in all instrumental ensemble settings, but he did not specifically name what skills might be needed in various contexts. It is possible that Weidner was alluding to the fact that skills necessary for MI in concert band may differ from those needed in other styles of instrumental

music, such as jazz or rock bands. This type of discipline-specific skill development may be highly variable to context, and is an important consideration in defining MI in choral settings.

Music Learner Dispositions

Although none of the studies I reviewed specifically mentioned learner dispositions as a topic of interest, there is evidence that providing more opportunities for student choice may increase student resilience (Dweck, 1999) and reciprocity (Carr & Claxton, 2002). Schatt (2022) investigated the perceptions of high school band students taking part in a democratic large ensemble experience. Students in the study rehearsed and performed a piece of band music entirely without the conductor's assistance, taking turns and sharing leadership responsibilities throughout a student-led rehearsal process. Schatt interviewed and surveyed participants after the concert to discover any changes in their feelings of self-efficacy and confidence. He found that through this experience students became more confident in their ability to make decisions and felt less dependent upon a teacher to successfully perform a piece of music. Learners in this study seemed to develop positive dispositions toward self-directed learning, reporting gains in self-efficacy and resilience from their engagement in student-led ensemble music-making.

In another study of student-directed large ensemble rehearsals, Hedgecoth (2018) investigated the perceptions of collegiate band musicians engaged in a conductor-less rehearsal and performance process. Hedgecoth's participants ($N = 63$) were members of a concert band at a large Midwestern university. Although many participants cited musical benefits such as improved listening and a greater internalization of the music, Hedgecoth found that contentious social conditions that emerged during the rehearsal process seemed to outweigh the perceived musical benefits. In a survey distributed to all participants, most of the feedback about the experience was negative, with some participants calling it a "painful experience," (p. 16) and

"very stressful, a lot of egos" (p. 16). The negative reactions of participants may suggest that student-directed learning in a traditionally teacher-centric class such as band may require its own system of scaffolded instruction to give students time and strategies to adjust to a new learning paradigm.

Harris (2017) explored the learning experiences of high school choir students participating in student-led choral ensembles. Similar to Schatt (2022), Harris reported that student-led ensembles helped participants to acquire confidence and develop skills to guide their own learning.

> When I allowed them to struggle and think about what they needed to do to acquire the music, they were always surprised to figure out on their own what methods and ideas would be helpful. If they had questions, sometimes they asked me for help or, just as easily, they asked their peers for suggestions (p. 111).

Harris found that students in self-directed ensembles persisted through challenges and learned problem-solving strategies on their own or turned to their peers for assistance. This suggests that when teachers provide students with opportunities to guide their own learning in ensemble settings, they may develop key dispositions such as resilience (Dweck, 1999) and reciprocity (Carr & Claxton, 2002).

Weidner (2020) suggested that social relationships developed in band class led to a sense of interdependence among ensemble members. Participants felt a sense of shared responsibility for the musical outcomes of the entire ensemble, which led to a role of implied leadership for every student in the band. Weidner included this sense of shared responsibility as a precondition for how students acquire musical independence in band. Weidner's description of interdependence as reliance upon peers as resources for learning closely aligns with Carr and

Claxton's (2002) definition of reciprocity, a key learning disposition in my framework for learner independence. Interdependence may explain why some students in large ensembles are compelled to work on their own to develop musical skills. Given that singing in choir may also promote a sense of shared responsibility among ensemble members, interdependence could also play an important role in developing musical independence in choir.

Agency

Student agency was a theme in several studies, but was particularly salient in those that explored democratic teaching practices in a cappella choirs. Berglin (2015) sought to examine the relationship between democratic practices and MI by exploring the organizational structure and musical practices of an all-female student-run collegiate a cappella group. He described how participants took turns "stepping up" (p. 60) to assume leadership roles regarding music instruction, costuming, choreography, and marketing. This sense of shared responsibility promoted a sense of individual agency in which all members felt ownership in the success of the group. Haning (2019) described student agency in a cappella choirs as marked by "the ability of group members to structure their own learning environment, choose their own goals, and set their own priorities throughout the learning process" (p. 73). This led participants to report high levels of emotional involvement, enthusiasm, and engagement. In this way, increased agential power may also contribute to playfulness (Carr & Claxton, 2002).

Not all researchers looking at MI seemed to prioritize student agency in their studies. Schatt (2022) investigated student perceptions of a democratic rehearsal process that did not include students in choosing repertoire. Nolet (2007) conducted a study about MI that focused on how students developed notational literacy. Although Nolet's study may be beneficial to choir

directors who are aiming to improve their choir members' sight-singing skills, her study did not explore agential components of MI.

Students in Weidner's studies (2015, 2020) exercised agency in making musical decisions regarding interpretation and style. They had opportunities to think critically about music while participating in student-led chamber ensembles (2015), student-led large rehearsals (2020), and through teacher-moderated discussions (2020). More importantly, students had the agency to act upon the critical decisions they made, both in small rehearsals and by trying out their individual ideas in the large rehearsal. Weidner's conceptual understanding of agency may differ substantially from that of Green (2006), Kratus (2007), and Williams (2014), as students in these studies did not improvise or create their own music; they only recreated previously composed music within the established traditions of wind band literature. This limited view of agency may result from how social discourses (Scott, 2010) may define the structural boundaries of what music is appropriate for band. Additionally, it did not appear that students had the agency to choose what music they performed, even in chamber settings. Further, student musical decision-making in chamber ensembles was highly influenced by teacher directives. In demonstrating the importance of teacher modelling, one student commented, "it's really just watching how Mr. Guss does it [rehearsal practice]. How he listens to it. . . . I'm watching them [the teachers] for what is important to them" (Weidner, 2015, p. 80). It may be that this type of teacher modelling is a necessary step in a continuum of how students acquire musical independence. It may also be that over-reliance on teacher modelling may induce the same type of teacher dependency that Allsup and Benedict (2008) described. Simply learning to apply fixed rules to music that teachers choose for their students is not indicative of learner agency. Although such practices may be valuable in helping students develop musical skills determined by their teachers, it is less

clear how they prepare students to take charge of their own musical learning, or how they might encourage learners to pursue musical opportunities beyond their experiences in band classes. In order to encourage students to develop self-directed approaches to music learning, teachers have to help students develop key skills, but they also must empower them to seek music making activities of their own choosing. Managing shifting roles between content-transmission and facilitation may be critical to teachers' effectiveness at promoting MI in choirs.

Context

A common thread in the studies I examined is the role of a supportive context in facilitating MI in students. Researchers described supportive contexts in a number of ways. Weidner (2015) included instructional supports such as scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976) and teacher modelling as well as social supports like peer collaboration and a positive social environment. Berglin (2015) reported findings centered around extra-musical benefits of participation such as individual empowerment, shared vulnerability, and transmission of group values. He suggested that democratic practices may encourage risk taking and student empowerment—agentive elements associated with learner independence (Mercer, 2011). Haning (2019) offered that learning environments avoiding strong power imbalances may improve student enthusiasm and engagement. This, in turn, may reinforce the key learning disposition of playfulness (Carr & Claxton, 2002). Students who are more engaged in music making have more opportunities to refine their skills, thereby building their sense of self-efficacy, which in turn may increase a learner's sense and exercise of agency (Mercer, 2011). In this way, MI is an iterative cycle that follows the framework I outlined for learner independence in Figure 1.

A Model for Musical Independence in High School Choir

There is tension between models of MI that are situated in traditional ideals of notational literacy (Nolet, 2007; Weidner, 2015; 2020) and more open philosophies of music learning that recognize other ways of being musical (e.g., Allsup, 2016). It may be that MI is best supported by opportunities for learners to explore musical experiences of their own choosing, beyond just the music that their director picks for them. An informed and culturally sensitive view of musical independence must consider the diverse aims and goals of a group of learners as well as the specific needs of individuals. Indeed, given the contingent relationship of learner independence and context, the skills associated with MI will look different across high school choir settings that pursue diverse musical traditions with varying musical goals. For instance, singing in a jazz choir likely prioritizes improvisation and swing feel whereas a concert choir performing Western European classical music may instead focus on fluency in reading notated music and bel canto singing style. It may be that a key attribute of MI in choir is developing the technical capacity to create sounds that are suited to a variety of musical styles instead of focusing upon the conventions of a single genre.

Teachers' and researchers' conceptions of MI must go beyond a set of skills that make students very good choir members. MI must also be emancipatory and free choir students to pursue opportunities to independently explore music of their own choosing. Recognizing that MI is a contextual, multi-dimensional construct, I offer the following description of musically independent high school choir students: (1) they possess skills to independently decode, perform, communicate, and create within the system of symbolic or aural transmission specific to a particular genre or repertoire, (2) they maintain positive dispositions toward learning (i.e., resilience, reciprocity, and playfulness), and (3) they exercise agency in *what* they choose to

learn about choral music and *how* they go about learning it. Musically independent students are supported by learning contexts that foster resilience, inspire playfulness, and encourage reciprocity (Carr & Claxton, 2002).

My conceptual model for MI in high school choirs (see Figure 2) is built upon the same three key processes involved in learner independence: skills and competencies, learner dispositions, and learner agency. It also considers the role of context and recognizes that the skills and competencies required for MI may vary based on the genre and style of the music students are learning. Like the model I outlined for learner independence, the processes are interrelated and interdependent, which are represented by the bidirectional arrows connecting the processes in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Visual Model for Musical Independence in High School Choirs
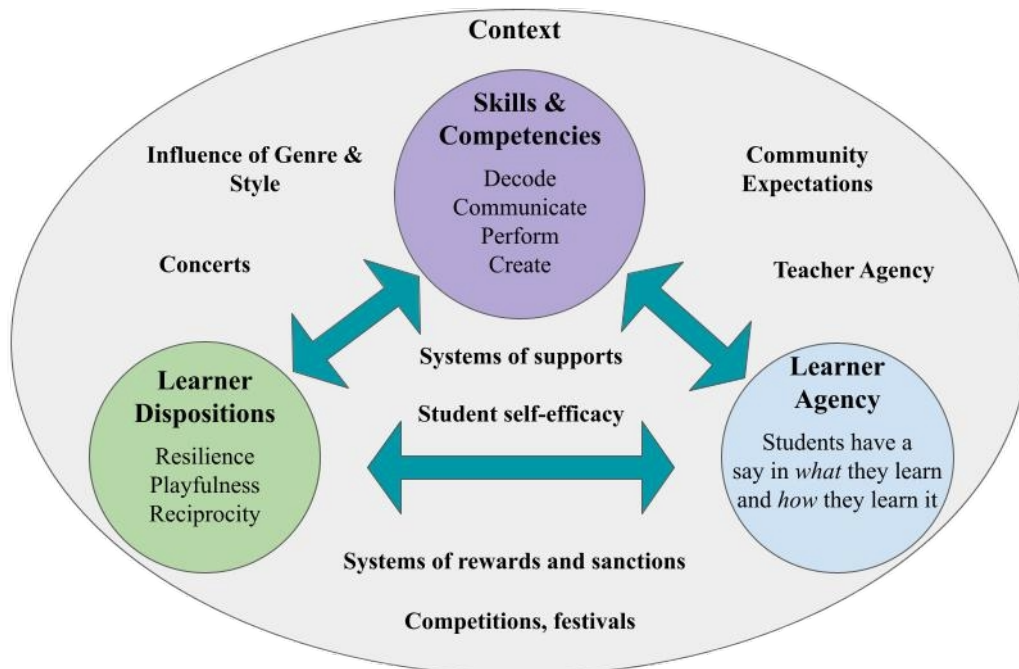
The Role of Context: Structure and Agency in Ensemble Teachers' Pedagogical Decisions

Scholars have considered social constructivist, student-centered approaches in music education (Scott, 2011; Shively, 2015; Wiggins, 2001), including in specific classroom settings such as band (Gilbert, 2016), orchestra (Scruggs, 2009), and choir (Norris, 2010). Despite decades of research and recommendations from educational organizations to move toward a more learner-centered style of instruction (National Association for Music Education, 2014; National Education Association, 2012), the teacher-directed rehearsal model of ensemble music is still prevalent in US secondary schools. Instructional decisions and contextual factors may facilitate or inhibit MI in choir students. In the next section, I examined both potential structural constraints to agency in ensemble learning spaces and the capacity for agentive music teachers to affect transformative action.

Structures in Choral Music Education

Scholars have contended that social structures such as capitalism (Abramo, 2021; Bates, 2017) and racism (Bradley, 2006; Hess, 2018) act as systems of oppression in music education. It is crucial to acknowledge that these pervasive and insidious structures must also be taken into account when considering MI in choir classrooms. Unequal access to resources, lack of cultural representation, and the hierarchical status of Western musical aesthetics continues to impact music curricula and student opportunities to learn. These inequities also have the potential to influence the components of the framework for MI that I presented in chapter two. For example, not all students have equal access to resources such as private lessons or instruments in their homes to support them in developing musical skills and competencies. Learning dispositions such as resilience may be negatively affected by adverse living conditions brought about by poverty. Students who do not see their cultural heritage represented in their school music

program may feel that they lack agency in making musical decisions. A conceptual framework for MI must acknowledge these structural constraints and their potential impact upon learners.

In addition to larger structural constraints, there are specific structures within music education that may also impact teachers and students in developing MI. Secondary music education in the US has long been built around performing ensembles which remain the most prevalent form of music instruction in US high schools (Elpus & Abril, 2019). Concerts—the public display of what students learned in the classroom—are central to ensemble music. Indeed, public performance is so ingrained in the curricula of school performing ensembles that many teachers report concert participation as the most important factor in assigning student grades (Kambs, 2023; Russell & Austin, 2010). In addition to public concerts, some ensemble teachers may experience community pressure to preserve traditions of performance excellence (Abramo, 2008; Haning, 2021; Shaw, 2014a). Others may experience professional demands to receive high scores at music contests as part of their annual teacher evaluation process (Hash, 2013; Robinson, 2015; Shaw, 2014b). These structures may be significant underlying mechanisms driving the pedagogical decisions of ensemble teachers.

When viewed as an immutable end product of ensemble music learning, public concerts may be seen as embodied objects (Scott, 2010) that have material impacts upon how teachers make pedagogical decisions in choir. The pressure of delivering high-quality public performances may lead choir teachers to prioritize teaching performance skills over more creative musical skills such as composition and improvisation, activities I argue are essential to fostering MI. Freer (2011) noted that the pressure to present high-quality concerts may create a paradox between the quality of musical performance and the quality of the music education they provide their students. High expectations for superior performances, Freer asserted, may lead

choir teachers to "exert increasing authoritarian control over [their] student ensembles as [they] attempt to extract ever-higher levels of performance excellence" (p. 170). Freer's argument, while salient in its critique of teacher-centric instruction, revealed the pervasiveness of performance as an embodied structure in ensemble education. Specifically, Freer's view was still grounded in the notion that a choir teacher's instructional goals are either to prepare for the performance or to build skills necessary for successful performance (p. 175). In stating this position, Freer still prioritized performance in teachers' pedagogical decision-making and neglected the other artistic processes—creating, responding, and connecting (NAfME, 2014)— that comprise the national standards for music instruction. Of the three processes, performing may be the least well-suited to pursuing independence, and yet it seems to be the most privileged mode of music-making in US secondary schools (Haning, 2021). Uncovering how performance goals create embodied structures that influence the instructional decisions of choir teachers may help explain how teachers go about prioritizing skills related to MI.

Community expectations and adherence to established traditions may act as discursive structures (Scott, 2010) that affect the instructional decisions of choir teachers. In his study, Haning found that teachers internalized community expectations for performance, moving from external influences to becoming structural parts of the music program (2021, p. 92). Meeting community expectations influenced teachers' repertoire decisions, created issues of time management, and limited their agency in the skills and content they chose to teach. In a study of marching band teachers, Shaw (2014a) reported similar findings, with teachers describing pressure from parents, students, administrators, and colleagues to uphold traditions of competitive excellence. Such external pressures from stakeholders may function as discursive structures that resist student-centered pedagogies aimed toward building MI.

Institutional and systemic structures (Scott, 2010) such as teacher evaluations may also impact teacher agency to set learning goals in choir classrooms. Robinson (2015) asserted that an overreliance on student achievement data in teacher evaluations has led some policy makers to use large-ensemble festival ratings as a measure of teacher performance. Despite issues with reliability and validity that might arise (Hash, 2013), and teacher concerns with using festival results as evaluation data (Shaw, 2014b), the pervasiveness of the competitive festival model in US secondary music education may lead some to view contest results as valid data of teacher effectiveness. With festival results factored into teacher evaluation, it becomes more likely that teachers will spend instructional time preparing for festival than in pursuing other learning goals. In this way, teacher evaluations may limit opportunities for students to engage in activities aimed toward building MI.

The Role of Teacher Agency

Choir teachers who prioritize MI and strive to create learner-centered opportunities in their classroom may face structural and discursive barriers (Scott, 2010) to their agentive actions. Bazan (2011) reported that teachers in his study of band teacher practices believed administrative pressures, school rules, and student expectations all impacted their agency in implementing student-directed instruction in band. Haning (2021) suggested that community expectations for high level music performances limited teacher agency in instructional decisions, leading them to prioritize concert preparation over other music learning activities. Natale-Abramo (published as Abramo, 2008) explored the tension between structure and agency in a narrative inquiry study of her own pedagogical practices in band. While working to create a more learner-centered music program, she felt excluded by professional colleagues who did not share her pedagogical vision and encountered resistance from students and community members with traditional expectations

for band. Despite the embodied and discursive barriers she faced, Natale-Abramo persisted in acting as an agent of change in her school's music program. She stated:

> As I resisted traditional practice, particularly in terms of band class, my reaction to that tradition propelled me forward to find new possibilities. In a sense, tradition was a springboard for change. My reaction and resistance to that barrier created a need for me to find new ways of practice. Where I could not completely remove the hindrances I experienced, at the same time I recreated the role of music teacher in relation to those hindrances, which was in part informed by a reaction to those barriers. In this case, it might be said that tradition both hindered and created agency (p. 106).

By weighing the potential costs and benefits of her actions and then developing an oppositional stance toward traditional practices, Natale-Abramo exhibited high levels of reflexivity (Archer, 2007). For Natale-Abramo, reflexivity mediated the hindrances of structural conditioning and enabled her to make pedagogical choices which transformed the existing structure of band pedagogy in her school.

Through reflexivity, choir teachers can imagine opportunities for transformative change in their classrooms and free themselves from structural constraints that can inhibit MI. Likewise, reflexivity may encourage choir students to consider their own learning processes and how they might acquire skills, nurture positive learning dispositions, and build agency within the structure of a choral ensemble.

Rationale for the Study

Although extant literature examines the concept of musical independence (MI) (Regelski, 1969; Shieh & Allsup, 2016; Stamer, 2002), most of it is written from a best practices or theoretical viewpoint. There is current empirical work exploring MI in band settings (Weidner,

2015, 2020), but more empirical research is needed to explore the phenomenon in choirs. New empirical research can help broaden the conceptual understanding of MI to more than just skills necessary to being a good ensemble member. New studies will fill a gap in the research of pedagogical practices teachers use to foster MI in choirs and help uncover what students believe about their opportunities to develop it. Finally, by examining contextual factors that may enable or constrain teaching practices and learning processes involved in developing MI, new research can point to promising teaching practices that may help students become lifelong music learners.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

In this dissertation, I explored what teachers and learners do in secondary choral settings to develop musical independence. Additionally, I sought to uncover potential structural constraints and affordances which may hinder or support teaching practices for building musical independence in choir. I also aimed to explain internal processes within individual school choir students that may lead them to become independent, lifelong music-makers as well as the contextual constraints and affordances that may inhibit or facilitate these learning processes. Using critical realism as a lens, I endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. What are the skills, dispositions, and agentive characteristics of musically independent students?

2. What instructional decisions do teachers make that facilitate or inhibit musical independence?

3. What are the contextual factors that inhibit or facilitate musical independence in students?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodology and research design for this dissertation. I began the chapter by (re)stating the purpose statement and research questions. Then I established the theoretical framework and considered how it informed my decisions for the proposed design of the study. Next, I described the participants and types of data and outlined data collection procedures. I closed the chapter by explaining the proposed methods of data analysis and interpretation, standards of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations for this study.

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1) What are the skills, dispositions, and agentive characteristics of musically independent students?

2) What instructional decisions do teachers make that facilitate or inhibit musical independence?

3) What are the contextual factors that inhibit or facilitate musical independence?

Theoretical Framework: Critical Realism

Critical Realism (CR) is a metatheory that seeks to explain how and why events happen in the world by distinguishing between what is real and what is known (Vincent & O'Mahoney,

2018). In staking out this position, CR theorists reject positivist paradigms that provide causal explanations limited only to what can be observed or measured. Positivist paradigms favor quantitative modeling to make predictions based upon Hume's law of constant conjunction (Mingers & Standing, 2017), which defined causality as nothing more than the observed regularities in associated events. To demonstrate constant conjunction, the object of study must be held consistent and external conditions remain constant, criteria that scientists strive to meet in laboratory settings. This form of inquiry is common in the natural sciences and is used to study phenomena functioning in closed systems, those that are governed by universal laws of nature.

Critical realists instead assert that the social world is an open system, comprised of an ever-changing interaction of individuals and structures (Bhaskar, 2015). Such dynamic interplay makes constancy and equivalence a practical impossibility. Archer (1998) explained:

> To the realist, the one factor which guarantees that social systems remain open (and even forbids thought experiments about closure) is that they are necessarily peopled…[T]here are properties and powers particular to people which include a reflexivity towards and creativity about any social context which they confront…There is, in short, no such thing as an enclosed order in society because it is not just the investigators but the inhabitants who can engage in thought experiments and put them into practice (p. 190).

Because, as Archer posited, social science occurs in open systems, research into phenomena in the social world requires a methodology that is explanatory and non-predictive.

Interpretivists assert that human knowledge of social reality is constructed by individuals and is relative to their real-world experiences (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Critical realists agree with this interpretivist position of epistemological relativism and affirm its value for studying

phenomena in open systems. Where CR diverges with interpretivist worldviews is when they embrace a type of *ontological* relativism that insists the world is made up of "multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p. 64) in which all that can be known to exist is the self. CR asserts that human-constructed views of reality, while varied and personal, occur within a *real* system of interrelated structures that exert influence upon people, enabling or constricting the ability to act. Critical realists also recognize that there is an independent reality that humans cannot fully observe or explain and that what we know of it is fallible (Bhaskar, 2008). With a realist ontology paired to a relativist epistemology, "critical realism is ontologically bold, but epistemologically modest" (Outhwaite, 1987, p. 34). To remain ontologically "bold" and leverage its full explanatory power, critical realist researchers focus on explaining underlying social mechanisms, and developing methods to support the discovery of them.

Because of society's dynamic and shifting reality, CR seeks to identify tendencies of mechanisms to act in certain ways in particular contexts (Sayer, 1992). Critical realists encourage intellectual movement toward better theories of reality by embracing *judgmental rationality* (Isaksen, 2022), the belief that some theories of the world are more convincing than others. With an aim to explain rather than predict, researchers who frame studies in critical realism can assert strong statements about the nature of the social world without making positivist, absolutist claims and also avoid an interpretivist slide toward solipsism. In this study, I leveraged the explanatory power of critical realism to identify underlying mechanisms involved in transmitting and acquiring musical independence.

Fundamentals of Case Study Research

In the social sciences, case study research is most appropriate when research questions require an in-depth explanation of how or why a social phenomenon occurs within a real-world

context (Yin, 2018, p. 4). Music education researchers have previously used case studies to examine a variety of topics, including individual assessment in general music classes (Salvador, 2011), occupational identity development of preservice music teachers (Haston & Russell, 2012), and social capital in community choirs (Langston & Barrett, 2008). One of the strengths of case study research is its focus on exploring both a contemporary phenomenon and how it can be understood within its context. Because the relationship between a phenomenon and its context can be challenging to disentangle, researchers must "bound the case" (Yin, 2018, p. 30) by setting spatial and time limits that describe it as a concrete manifestation of a real-world phenomenon. Yin explained this process through the following example:

> Take the concept of 'neighboring.' Alone, it could be the subject of research studies using methods other than the case study method…However, the concept could readily become a case study topic if it were accompanied by your selecting a specific neighborhood ('case') to be studied and posing study questions and propositions about the neighborhood in relation to the concept of 'neighboring' (p. 31).

So, while the topic of interest (the phenomenon) in the example above is "neighboring," the "case" is a specific neighborhood. This helpful distinction illustrates how case study researchers can study a function within the confines of a bounded case.

Merriam (1998) believed that "single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study: the case" (p. 27). Like Yin, Merriam spoke definitively about bounding the case and the researcher's need to "fence [it] in" (p. 27). This is not just to better define the case, but also to identify what *not* to study.

Critical Realist Implications in Case Study Research

Case study research supported by a critical realist framework seeks to explain how a

phenomenon happened by considering both potential causal mechanisms and the context within

which they may occur (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Pawson and Tilly (1997) summarized this

assumption with the equation Mechanism + Context = Outcome. Because CR scholars believe

that a phenomenon cannot be understood separated from its context, they tend to favor

qualitative methods that concentrate on the interaction of mechanisms and their contexts.

Critical realist researchers also aim to explain observed phenomena in a manner

consistent with its ontological premise of a stratified reality consisting of the real, the actual, and

the empirical (Bhaskar, 2008). Therefore, when CR researchers consider what caused an

observed experience, they seek to uncover the hidden mechanisms that give rise to the events

which produce the experiences and observations that appear at the level of the empirical (see

Figure 3).

Figure 3

Stratified Depth Ontology in CR
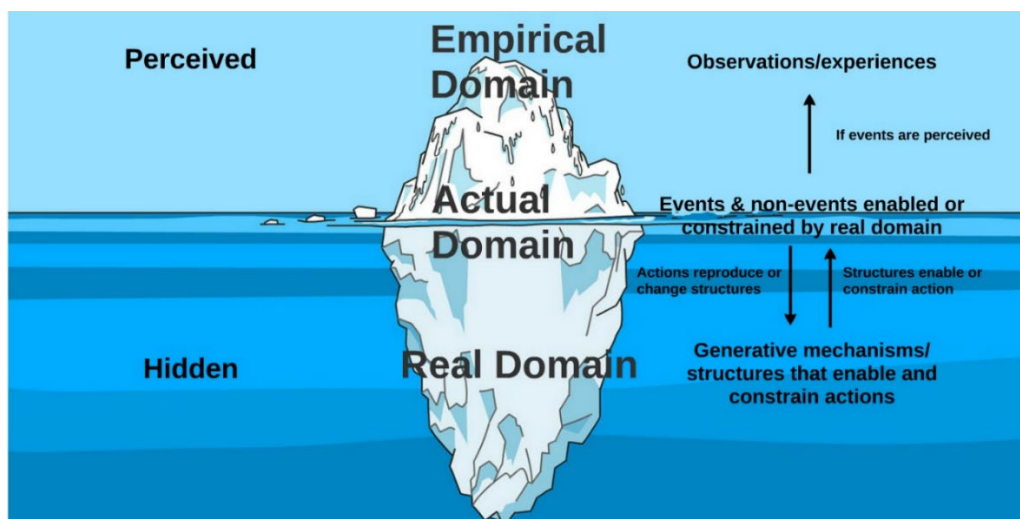
From *"Critical Realism's Stratified Reality,"* by Brad C. Anderson, September 2019.
(https://prezi.com/0zcxutudn03s/critical-realist-stratified-reality/). Licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Critical realism aims to understand causal mechanisms of observed phenomena in part by *explaining structure and context* (Wynn & Williams, 2012). This assists investigators in isolating the causal tendencies that generated the phenomenon from the existing structure and context of the research setting. In analysis, researchers "decompose the relevant structure into its constituent parts such as actors, rules, relationships, etc. as they are encountered in the event descriptions" (p. 798–799). In a choral music education setting, actors (i.e., teachers and students) have different roles and access to power, and differing structural elements in specific settings may actualize different causal powers. For example, a choir classroom that employs democratic practices may create structural affordances that activate more student agency in musical decision-making, while simultaneously reducing the causal powers of teacher-guided skill development.

By asserting causal claims, CR scholars offer explanations for *why* and *how* specific events in a specific context involving specific actors occurred. They do not seek to make predictive claims about how the next occurrence of a similar event may happen. But in explaining how an event happened in one context, researchers may learn more about the phenomenon of interest. In a multiple case study, there are even more opportunities for identifying underlying causal mechanisms as researchers uncover commonalities and differences across contexts, potentially broadening the application and strengthening the impact of a researcher's findings.

This is not the same, however, as making statistical generalizations (Yin, 2018), which hold that what happens in one context may predict what happens in another context. Instead, researchers can instead use cross-case findings to make theoretical generalizations, a concept that Wynn and Williams (2012) carefully explained:

Rather the intent under CR is to utilize the detailed causal explanations of the

mechanisms at work in a given setting to obtain insights as to how and why a similar

mechanism could lead to different, or perhaps similar, outcomes in a different setting…

Thus, generalizability provides a means to leverage existing statements of causal

mechanisms to explain events observed within the specific context of the new setting as

opposed to predicting outcomes based on the generalization of theory to a new population

or context (pp. 804 –805).

Yin also discussed theoretical generalization, stating "[r]ather than thinking about your case(s) as

a sample [of a population], you should think of your case study as the opportunity to shed

empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles" (2018, p. 38). In other words, findings

from this dissertation should not be used to describe the characteristics of a population of

learners or teachers. Instead, I aimed to leverage this study's explanatory findings to help

develop and extend promising theories of music teaching and learning. It is in the interest of

uncovering hidden knowledge about teaching practices and music learning that I adopted a case

study design.

Research Design

Informed by critical realism, I explored musical independence in choral ensembles

through an explanatory, multiple case study. This design was appropriate because my purpose

was to explain how and why a phenomenon occurred in specific contexts by examining multiple

cases (Yin, 2018). Scholars who embrace critical realism (Bhaskar, 2015) recognize that these

explanations are fallible and incomplete, and are situated within the real parameters of a

researcher's worldview. Maxwell (2012) further explained that critical realists view research

designs as "real entities, not simply as abstract, formal plans or models" (p. 71), that reflect the

meanings, motives, and understandings of the researcher. Accordingly, these aspects of the researcher's worldview are real, causally efficacious phenomena which carry real consequences for the conduct of the study. Furthermore, Maxwell (2012) recognized that research design also includes the actions of the researcher in the field and the contextual factors which influence the study's participants and shape a researcher's findings. Because of the strong influence of context upon potential outcomes (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), I drew upon multiple sources of data including field observations, student journal entries, and teacher and student interviews to triangulate and validate my findings (Yin, 2018, p. 127).

Defining and Bounding the Case

I defined each case as including the pedagogical practices of high school choir teachers and the actions of their students, bounded by the limits of daily instructional time and the physical space of the classroom. This definition recognizes that not all instruction in choral classrooms is oriented toward the goal of musical independence, and that much of the teaching I observed may not have been for the specific purpose of developing student musical independence. However, I was also interested in pedagogical practices and contextual factors that may constrain musical independence. Accordingly, I considered evidence as either contributing toward the phenomenon of musical independence or detracting from it.

Each case was bound in time and space. In considering factors that enabled or constrained musical independence, I first examined evidence gathered from my observations of the choir classrooms I studied and classified these data as primary contextual components for analysis. However, I also considered factors in students' musical lives outside of choir, such as private piano lessons or membership in another ensemble, that may have impacted how they

developed musical independence. I gathered this data through student interviews and journal prompts and included these factors as secondary contextual components for analysis.

Participants

I purposively selected participants (Patten & Newhart, 2018) based on their professional reputation for prioritizing musical independence in how they taught choir. Beginning with recommendations from faculty at Michigan State University, I contacted high school choir teachers (see recruitment letter, included as Appendix A) with a reputation for prioritizing musical independence in their choir classrooms. I then observed and interviewed recommended teachers to understand more about how they conceptualized musical independence and how they incorporated it into their instructional practices. From these prospective candidates, I purposively selected three choir teachers who viewed musical independence from a multi-dimensional perspective that recognizes the artistic processes of performing, creating, responding, and connecting (NAfME, 2014).

I also chose participants from sites that were geographically located close enough for me to conduct in-person observations and interviews. This was necessary for me to observe the phenomenon in its real-world context. Prior to data collection, selected teacher participants filled out an informed consent form, attached as Appendix B. At each site, I chose to observe the choir that the teacher recommended as the most beneficial for observing the teaching and learning musical independence. In making this decision, I relied upon the teachers' expert knowledge of their curriculum and students to guide me to select the best participating choirs for study. I chose student interview participants partly based upon their engagement with the daily journal prompts, selecting those who regularly posted detailed responses. I also consulted with teachers for recommendations and cross-referenced their recommendations with my potential list of

participants that I drew from the journal response data. Additionally, I chose student participants of different voice parts to provide a varied perspective of student experiences from within the choir. In total, I selected three students from each site for semi-structured interviews.

Samantha Parker, Southeastern High School[3]

I first met Samantha observing student teachers in her classroom. At the time of this study, Samantha was in her 13th year of teaching. Her first teaching placement was at a school where she taught both middle school choir and K-8 general music. After two years at her first job, Samantha moved to her current placement at Southeastern High School where she has taught high school choir, guitar, and music theory for the past 11 years. She holds a Master of Music degree in choral conducting and has presented on a variety of choral music topics at state conventions. In addition, Samantha is an accomplished performer and composer with experience in a variety of genres. In 2014, Samantha wrote, arranged, and performed her own solo album. She still sings professionally, performing classical choral music with a highly recognized treble ensemble and appearing regularly in local venues as a pop/jazz solo vocalist. Samantha described her musical background:

> While there [in her undergraduate program], I dabbled in other types of performing,
> singing in a lot of cover bands, jam bands, stuff like that. I lived with all jazz majors, so I
> decided to do some jazz lessons for my creative musicianship electives. I was not really
> the type to sing in acapella groups, I didn't do church jobs, you know, the things that
> [choir] singers typically do. But I was always trying to be on the music scene, [be] part of
> bands. I was a lot more keyed into that than any of my peers that I remember in the music
> program, so I was always around musicians that were creating music. I started doing

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[3] All names of participants and their schools are pseudonyms.

studio work, learning about songwriting, and putting stuff together in bands and performing in a lot of bars, shows, and stuff like that. So that was probably a little different than most other music majors. I was kind of like that in high school, too. Most of my friends were in bands. I was always around that, because I wanted to do more of that and didn't always know how, you know? So, I've always been around the music scene, and very connected to that (SP Initial Interview, February 16).

At the time of data collection, Samantha taught in a large suburban school district in the Midwest. During the term I observed, she taught three choirs and a guitar class at Southeastern High School, a school of just over 1,600 students. According to the most recent available data from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), the population of Southeastern High School was majority White (85%, $n = 1,358$), with smaller percentages of students identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native (0.5%, $n = 8$), Asian (5%, $n = 79$), Black (1.3%, $n = 22$), Hispanic (3%, $n = 47$), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.0%, $n = 0$), and as two or more races (5.6%, $n = 91$)[4]. Southeastern High School is a low-poverty school, with less than 12% ($n = 192$) of the student body eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. Of her three choirs, Samantha chose to have me observe her advanced mixed choir, a group of 39 students in grades 10 – 12. In addition to observing rehearsals over the course of three weeks, I also interviewed three students from this choir to learn more about their experiences and perspectives related to musical independence in choir. I collected assent letters from each student participant (see Appendix C) and consent letters from their parents or guardians (see Appendix D) before their participation in the study. Samantha helped me choose student participants for interviews based upon her knowledge of each student's ability to articulate their perceptions of musical independence.

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[4] Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Julia Newcomer, Central High School

I came to know Julia through her work with the school music association in her home state. Julia had established a reputation as a respected clinician and adjudicator and was well-known for her skill in teaching her choirs to sight-sing. At the time of this study, Julia was in her sixteenth year of teaching and her second year at Central High School. Although she trained as a band and choral teacher, Julia had exclusively taught choir since graduating with a bachelor's degree in music education in 2008. In addition to her undergraduate education, Julia holds a Master of Music Education degree. Raised in a musical family, she started school music as a band student but didn't take her first choir class until she was a freshman in high school. Julia described her musical background in this way:

> One of the things that is super cool is that they [the public school where she attended] actively encouraged participation across the musical disciplines. So, I was in band and choir all four years of high school and then because I was a top chair in band, I was also able to be part of the orchestra. So yeah, that was a lot of musicking. I come from a very musical family. My grandmother is an Oberlin Conservatory piano grad so there's always sort of been music [in our family]. I guess the challenge in that is that my family's careers have not been musically based. So, there was a lot of confusion when I decided that I wanted to be a music educator. They were like, "What do you mean? Music is something we do for fun, not something we do for money." So yeah, I had great aspirations of being a band director when I started high school. The choir directors were sort of in flux at my school. And then Paula Parker[5] came in as a school choir director when I was a junior and made me take the discipline more seriously. She's an amazing educator and an amazing

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[5] I assigned a pseudonym to this individual to maintain their anonymity.

human and someone who I still am actively involved with. So, [because of her guidance]
I started doing more of the extra choir things (e.g., honors choir, solo and ensemble
festival). When I decided to major in music and went out to do my auditions, I auditioned
as a vocalist, which was not the direction I thought I was going to go. One of the things
about my undergraduate degree is that it's a full comprehensive music education degree
(i.e., vocal and instrumental certification). So, I had to do all of the classes, all of the
woodwind methods and all the brass methods and string methods. During my collegiate
time, my goal was to find a position where I could do both band and choir as a director.
Then I graduated from college in 2008, which is when the economy tanked so I was
fortunate to be offered a high school choir position. So, then I kind of full "choir-nerded"
and was there for almost 15 years before I came here. And I think it's useful to have both
perspectives. It is kind of funny…I think a lot of instrumentalists don't understand that
vocalists are also musicians and I had similar feelings as a younger musician, so I get
where they're coming from. But I think there's a unique perspective having done both
worlds. (JN Initial Interview, March 1).

At the time of this study, the school district in which Julia taught was classified as *rural
fringe* by the NCES. Central High School is located less than five miles from a major
Midwestern university, and there are many residential neighborhoods within the school district
where university faculty live with their families. According to the most recent NCES statistics,
Central High School housed a total of 1,466 students. The student population was majority White
(57%, $n = 835$), with smaller percentages of students identifying as American Indian/Alaska
Native (0.2%, $n = 3$), Asian (22.7%, $n = 333$), Black (6.9%, $n = 101$), Hispanic (5.2%, $n = 75$),
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.0%, $n = 0$), and as two or more races (8.1%, $n = 119$).

Central High School is a low poverty school with 20% ($n = 297$) of the student population eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. During the time I observed at Central High School, Julia taught three choirs and one music class for students with disabilities at the high school, then travelled to the junior high school to teach two periods of junior high chorus. She chose to have me observe her intermediate treble ensemble, a choir comprised of 21 sopranos and altos in grades 9 – 12. As with Southeastern High School, I obtained assent and consent forms from students and their guardians and interviewed three student participants to learn about their perceptions and experiences of musical independence in choir. Julia assisted me in selecting participants that she thought would provide valuable perspectives to the study.

Wanda Fox, Northern High School

Wanda was recommended to me for this study by another participant, Samantha Parker, due to Wanda's vast teaching experience, reputation for excellence, and her leadership in the state school music association. At the time of data collection, Wanda was in her 37th year of teaching, all with the Northern school district. After finishing her bachelor's degree in choral music education, Wanda worked for a short time as an administrative assistant at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. While there, she studied voice, received opera coaching, and learned about the workings of a professional opera company. When I asked Wanda about her experience performing and how she ended up in music education, she explained:

> I was music education [focused] from the get-go. I toyed around with the idea of performance, but working at the opera was enough to say "no, no" (laughs). So really, when I finished at the opera, before I went into teaching, I had to decide, "Did I want to do arts management?" because I loved the world of opera, and I loved working at the Lyric. But my teaching certificate was going to start to run out, so I had to make a choice.

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And since I hadn't taught at all, I thought in fairness, I needed to dabble in teaching and

see if that truly was my calling, because I had mentors who kept saying, "No, you need to

teach, you need to be teaching." (WF Initial Interview, February 26).

Wanda took her first job in the Northern school district in 1987. Much of her early career was

spent teaching junior high chorus and general music at another school in the district. While

continuing to teach, she earned a master's degree in choral conducting in 1992. Wanda

eventually moved to Northern High School in 2015 where she has taught beginning,

intermediate, and advanced level treble choirs. In addition to her teaching duties, Wanda also

served as the K-12 music coordinator for the school district.

During the time I observed at Northern High School, the NCES classified the school

district locale as *rural fringe*. Northern High School is located outside a town known regionally

as a tourist destination, and many students take summer work in the area's thriving service

industry. According to the most recent NCES statistics, the school served just over 1,500

students. The student population was majority White (89%, $n = 1,336$), with smaller percentages

of students identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native (1.3%, $n = 20$), Asian (1.5%, $n = 23$),

Black (1.2%, $n = 19$), Hispanic (3.7%, $n = 59$), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.1%, $n = 2$),

and as two or more races (3.4%, $n = 52$). Unlike the other two schools in the study, Northern

High School was classified as a high poverty school, with 34% ($n = 519$) of the student

population eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. During the time I observed, Wanda was

teaching beginning and advanced level treble choirs at Northern High School as well as an extra-

curricular ensemble at the other high school in the district. The choir she chose for me to observe

was her beginning treble chorus, a group of 16 sopranos and altos in ninth grade. Like the other

participating schools, students and their guardians submitted assent and consent forms so that I

could interview three student participants. Wanda helped me select participants that she thought would provide valuable perspectives related to musical independence in choir.

Data Collection

Data sources included (1) field notes of classroom observations, (2) teacher journals, (3) student journals, (4) teacher interviews, and (5) student interviews. I gathered data from an outsider perspective (Nakata, 2015), collecting evidence as a third-person observer. Although I maintained an outsider's distance while collecting data, my extensive experience as a high school choir teacher and my graduate-level study of music teaching and learning granted me insider knowledge that I used to analyze the strategies and activities I observed in choir classrooms. Qualitative researchers often have insider status and frequently can gain quick acceptance from their participants, which may lead to a greater depth to the data they collect (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Observations

Naturalistic observation of high school choir classes was my primary data collection method. As the primary data collection instrument in this study, I used my field notes to create a thick description of each case to highlight the phenomenon in its real-world context. Each case story served as an *explication of events* (Wynn & Williams, 2012) that I used to establish an empirical foundation for the context and events surrounding the phenomenon of musical independence.

I observed one choir at each site, each for a total of three weeks. In creating a schedule, I wanted to find a way to time my observations so that choirs would be negotiating similar external contextual factors (e.g., state music festivals, grading cycles, etc.) during my time with them. For this reason, I created a ten-week rotating schedule (See Table 1) so that I could both

conduct in-depth immersive observations and engage in cross-case analysis of data throughout

the process. I structured weeks one through three so that I observed one choir daily for a week, a

second choir daily on the subsequent week, followed by a week of daily observations of the third

choir. During week four, I conducted teacher interviews before beginning the observation cycle

again (weeks five through seven). The final observation cycle occurred during weeks eight

through ten. During the last week of observation at each site, I interviewed three students from

each choir. At the conclusion of each school's observation cycle, I conducted a final teacher

interview at each site.

Table 1

Data Collection Schedule

Week 1	Observe Choir A	Monday – Friday
Week 2	Observe Choir B	Monday – Friday
Week 3	Observe Choir C	Monday – Friday
Week 4	Semi-structured teacher interviews	According to participant availability
Week 5	Observe Choir A	Monday – Friday
Week 6	Observe Choir B	Monday – Friday
Week 7	Observe Choir C	Monday – Friday
Week 8	Observe Choir A	Monday – Friday
Week 8	Semi-structured student interviews	According to participant availability
Week 8	Final teacher interview	According to participant availability

Table 1 (cont'd)

Week 9	Observe Choir B	Monday – Friday
Week 9	Semi-structured student interviews	According to participant availability
Week 9	Final teacher interview	According to participant availability
Week 10	Observe Choir C	Monday – Friday
Week 10	Semi-structured student interviews	According to participant availability
Week 10	Final teacher interview	According to participant availability

Journal Entries

During the weeks that I was on site, students had the opportunity to respond to a weekly journal prompt (all journal prompts are included as Appendix E) electronically via Google Classroom. I used these journal entries to chronicle the experiences of learners responding to their teacher's pedagogical decisions. Each journal prompt asked participants to reflect on the specific learning activities I observed that week and were written so that participants could respond to specific classroom activities and events through the tri-modal conceptual framework of musical independence (i.e., skills, dispositions, agency) I outlined in chapter two. By using participant reflections to identify and explain the events and actions surrounding the phenomenon, I aimed to build an empirical foundation for the structural, agential, and contextual factors that may enact causal mechanisms (Wynn & Williams, 2012) involved in musical independence.

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers (interview protocol included as Appendix F) at the end of my first week of observations at each site. I interviewed teachers first so that I could better understand the reasons behind their pedagogical decisions and identify potential structural constraints or affordances they may have experienced in enacting their intended instructional plans. At the beginning of my final week at each site, I interviewed individual students (interview protocol included as Appendix G) to learn more about their perceptions of their internal learning processes that may have or may not have arisen from their teacher's instructional activities. I chose to interview individuals instead of focus groups so that I could gain personal insights into their individual experiences and minimize the risk that their responses would be biased by those of their peers. Additionally, I asked student participants questions pertaining to structural constraints or affordances they may identify in becoming musically independent in choir. At the conclusion of observations at each site, I conducted individualized follow-up interviews with teachers based on preliminary results so that they could reflect on the experience of being in the study and validate or dispute emergent findings.

Data Analysis

First, I used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2014) to "fracture" the data (Strauss, 1987, p. 29) from my field notes, student journal entries, and transcriptions of teacher and student interviews into discrete units, or codes. Then I took the categories derived from open coding and put them back together by making connections between categories in a process of axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). This initial analysis resulted in emergent themes that arose from the empirical data. To assist me with data management, I used Atlas.ti to organize the codes from my analysis of field observations, journal entries, and interview transcripts from each research site.

Critical realists believe in a stratified reality that consists of the real, the actual, and the empirical (Bhaskar, 2008). To uncover hidden mechanisms that may have caused the observed data in each case, I utilized the critical realist analytical process of retroduction, "a creative process for the researcher in which multiple explanations are proposed which describe a causal mechanism, set within a social structure, that must exist in order to produce the observed events" (Wynn & Williams, 2012, p. 800). Put another way, retroduction requires the researcher to ask questions about the necessary conditions in order for the phenomenon to exist (Danermark et al, 2018). In this study, retroductive analysis involved me looking back through data to make inferences as to probable causal mechanisms for musical independence. I engaged in this analysis through researcher memos and a systematic process of counterfactual thinking (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013) in which I imagined how developing musical independence might have differed had the teachers or students made different choices. In this stage of analysis, I also looked to see what elements of structure may be interrelated with each other in choir settings and then posited how they might be related to the phenomenon of interest. Sayer (1992) suggested that to find connections between structure and events, investigators should ask questions such as: "What does the existence of this object (in this form) presuppose? Can it exist on its own as such? If not what else must be present? What is it about the object that makes it do such and such?" (p. 91). I asked these questions to bring me closer to explanations of causal tendencies involved in musical independence.

Once I identified potential mechanisms through retroduction, I compared them to the themes that emerged from the multiple streams of evidence (e.g., interviews, field notes, and journal entries). In this process, known as empirical corroboration (Wynn & Williams, 2012, p. 801), I relied upon judgmental rationality (Isaksen, 2022) to help me consider the patterns found

in the data against the counterfactual narrative of my researcher memos to arrive at the best possible explanations for the observed phenomenon. I first looked within-case (Creswell & Poth, 2018) using pattern-matching logic (Yin, 2018) to compare empirical data to potential rival theories (Yin, 2018) I developed through retroduction. Then I engaged in cross-case analysis to determine if patterns persisted over multiple cases.

Standards of Trustworthiness/Validation

Because I aimed to explain causes of events, it is important to utilize as many analytical tools as possible to validate findings and overcome possible bias. Wynn and Williams state, "we as researchers should endeavor to approach the underlying reality from multiple viewpoints in order to overcome our perceptual limitations" (2012, p. 803). They advocate for not only using multiple sources of data, but also employing theoretical triangulation, that is investigating empirical data from a multitude of perspectives and testing it against rival theories. I used multiple streams of data (field notes, journal entries, and interviews) to triangulate data (Merriam, 1998) and engaged in pattern matching for rival explanations (Yin, 2018). To ensure that I accurately presented the viewpoints of the study's participants, I returned transcribed interviews to all participants for member checking (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, I asked the participating teachers to comment upon my initial within-case data analysis of their classroom to enhance credibility. Finally, I submitted preliminary findings from within-case and cross-case analysis to music education faculty members and fellow doctoral students for peer review. Through a combination of triangulation, pattern matching, member checking, and peer review, I strove to establish a high level of trustworthiness in this study's findings.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Before undertaking this study, I received approval from the Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. All participants under the age of 18 returned forms signed by their parents or guardians that granted consent for them to take part in the study. Students who participated in semi-structured interviews also provided me with their written assent to take part in the study. I also took special care to protect the identities of all participants through the use of self-chosen pseudonyms. I de-identified student participant data so that teachers were not aware of who responded in what way to interview and journal prompts. This helped encourage students to provide open and honest perceptions of their teacher's pedagogical decisions and felt freer to identify potential contextual barriers to developing musical independence.

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, case study research framed by critical realism cannot be used to make predictive claims or provide statistical generalizations to a larger population. Yin (2018) cautioned against using sampling logic (p. 56) because the small number of cases studied cannot be considered to be representative of any group. Critical realist case study research, however, may provide music education researchers with a new approach to building knowledge in ensemble settings. By explaining the underlying causal mechanisms that potentially affect learners, CR frameworks can identify promising teaching practices that could be valuable in multiple settings. It may be particularly effective at describing the interaction of structure and agency (Bhaskar, 2015) within choral ensembles. Given that exercising musical independence is inherently an agential act, CR may be uniquely equipped to explain the underlying causal mechanisms involved in developing musical independence in choirs.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION: SOUTHEASTERN HIGH SCHOOL

'Producing' Musically Independent Students

"I'm just going to give you all your do [solfège syllable]," Ms. Parker calls out to the choir as they prepare to rehearse the next piece on their concert program. I am seated in the vast, opulent performing arts center at Southeastern High School, observing a final touch-up rehearsal before the choir's concert that evening. I marvel at the performance space, look around at the plush seating that stretches up to the top of the second balcony, and let the rich, reverberant acoustics wash over me. The accompanist rolls an F major chord at the piano and the choir answers on the tonic pitch. Ms. Parker responds, "Can you all just sing [singing] Do-mi-sol-mi-do," and the choir echoes her pattern. With the tonality established, Ms. Parker continues, "Now, can you all please sing your first note at measure six?" She preps the first breath with an open, inviting gesture and the choir sings their starting pitches. Moments later, the accompanist gently plays a C3 on the keyboard, and Ms. Parker responds without missing a beat, "Tenors, you actually start on low sol." The tenor section adjusts their pitch downwards by a perfect fourth and the properly voiced chord rings through the resonant room.

The singers appear settled and confident, giving me the impression of purpose and energy emanating from the stage. They seem ready for the concert and eager to perform. Their level of focus is remarkable, especially given the cacophony of power tools and construction sounds echoing around the room. While the students are rehearsing on stage, there are three maintenance workers installing a strobe light for a fire alarm, running hammer drills and talking loudly while they work. Ms. Parker and her students seem unfazed, fully locked into concert preparation mode. She methodically spot-checks note accuracy, consistently using solfège to

provide intervallic relationships as they rehearse, drawing upon skills that I've seen her teach in sight-singing exercises.

When it seems like she has checked off her list of "trouble spots," Ms. Parker instructs the choir to scramble their formation so that they are no longer standing in sections arranged by voice part. After the students have settled into new spots, Ms. Parker speaks quietly to the ensemble: "Turn in and look at each other, I'm just barely here. This time, sing to each other." Choir members lock eyes with their neighbors, breathe as one, and begin to sing. (SEHS field notes, February 24, 2024).

Having observed student teachers in Samantha Parker's classroom before, I knew a bit about her curriculum and the opportunities she gave students to explore and create in choir, so I was excited when she agreed to participate in this study. Prior to beginning data collection, Samantha and I talked through her curricular plan for the semester. We scheduled my week-long visits to coincide with three different units—solo performance, large-group festival preparation, and the cabaret project—so that I could observe a variety of activities, each with different performance-based outcomes. At the end of each observation week, I sent Samantha a journal prompt to distribute to her students that they could complete on a volunteer basis. Additionally, Samantha helped me to recruit three student participants for semi-structured interviews.

Participants

During the time of this study, the first student participant, Xavier[6], was a 10th grade, cisgender White male who sang baritone in Southeastern High School's advanced mixed choir. Besides being heavily involved in choir, he participated on the varsity rowing team, was an avid reader, and loved to hike and travel. In addition to singing with the advanced mixed choir, Xavier

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[6] All names of student participants are pseudonyms.

also sang in a barbershop quartet that performed at community and school functions. He credited his grandmother for encouraging his musical involvement from a young age. Xavier told me that although he started school music as an orchestra student, he switched to choir in intermediate school after realizing that his musical interests were leading him elsewhere.

> So, my first year where music was available to us was in intermediate school, I think it was fourth or fifth grade, and we were allowed to pick an instrument. I picked viola and played it for one year. I just never really had that emotional attachment to it. But I would find myself singing while I was playing the viola. We'd be playing, and to actually hear the notes, I would vocalize. It got to the point where I realized that music was drawing me in a different direction (Xavier, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

The second student participant I interviewed, Kermie, was an 11th grade, non-binary, Arab-American who sang soprano in Southeastern High School's advanced mixed choir. Outside of choir class, Kermie participated in an extra-curricular a cappella choir and was the vice-president of the choir council. Like Xavier, Kermie had been involved in choir for many years, getting their start in school choir as a fourth-grade student. When I asked them about their early music experience, Kermie told a story about a talent show they participated in when they were around seven years old.

> When I found out that there was this talent show, I ran to the judge, and I was like, "Pretty please, let me sing." He's like, "What do you want to sing?" And I'm like, "I'll tell you later." Somehow, I ended up getting a spot. When it was my turn to perform, I grabbed the microphone and completely made something up in the moment. It was something about trees, something like, "Some of them are tall, some of them are short, they're also beautiful. Did you know they make oxygen?" But I performed it all in song. I

really don't remember if it turned out well, but I ended up winning. That ego boost [from winning], I was so happy. It held my confidence for years. It made me want to sing (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

The third student participant from Southeastern High School, Bats, was a 12th grade, cisgender White male who sang bass. Bats was a former three-sport athlete who gave up two of his three sports to focus more on music. During his time at Southeastern, he participated in regional honor choir, state solo and ensemble festival, musical theater, a cappella groups, sang in a barbershop with Xavier, and attended summer music camps. Bats had been accepted and planned to attend a major mid-western university in the upcoming fall to major in music education. When I asked him how he got his start in music, he described how his father was a pivotal influence.

> I've always loved singing, and I don't play too many instruments, but I play a little bit of piano and my dad's pretty good at guitar. My first music memory [is of] me and my dad driving, and we were listening to "Home" by Phillip Phillips. I was probably seven or eight at a time, singing at the top of my lungs and my dad said, "You sound pretty good son." That really just kind of sparked my love for singing, and I've been singing every word to every song I know since then. If you ride in the car with me, it's a chore to get me to shut up. I just love music. I love studying it, I love learning it, I love singing it. I love playing it…it's a part of who I am (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

In this chapter, I present findings from my analysis of field observations, class journal responses, and interviews with Ms. Parker and the three student participants from Southeastern High School's advanced mixed choir. I organized this chapter by describing findings as they related to my research questions. Additionally, I presented codes and themes that emerged out of

the data that may help explain underlying factors affecting student and teacher perceptions of MI. I closed the chapter by interpreting and discussing the main themes of my findings.

What Are the Skills of Musically Independent Choir Students?

During my time at Southeastern High School, I often observed students engaged in skill-building activities. I watched them practice sight-singing, listened to class discussions about musical phrasing and word stress, and observed Ms. Parker model specific aspects of vocal technique for her students to emulate. Students practiced these skills in large ensemble settings, but they also had opportunities to work in small groups and on their own. As part of her curriculum, Ms. Parker regularly assessed individual students on a set of key musical skills (included as Appendix H). She required individual students to submit recordings or perform two skills of their choice each trimester until they completed the entire grid of technical skills.

Technical Skills

Notational Literacy

In our interviews, all participants acknowledged the value of building specific musical skills as a component of MI. Among these skills, they identified music literacy and sight-singing as important to supporting MI. For participants at Southeastern High School, music literacy referred to fluency in Western systems of notated music. In our interview, however, Ms. Parker seemed to recognize that the skills necessary for students to learn music independently may not be limited to this definition of music literacy. "The base level [of MI] is can they figure out how to read it, or how to learn it. Some of them might do it by ear, but they're still able to process and figure it out on their own" (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024).

When I asked students if sight-singing was important to their sense of MI, they provided a nuanced view. Bats believed music literacy to be "necessary for individuals who are serious

about their musical independence, but for more casual singers or players, I think it's okay to take some more time to learn something" (Bats, follow-up interview, March 20, 2024). In this quote, Bats seemed to establish a hierarchy of musical skills, implying that notational literacy was necessary for "serious" musicians. Kermie expressed a different view, explaining that music literacy may not be the only way to develop MI:

> I think that they [music scores] can be used as tools. There are many people who can work independently without them, and many people who work really well with them…I guess it can be a barrier for some people where they're like, 'I can sing, but I learn by ear, I don't learn by reading this.' And I think a good choir is something that gives people different ways to learn (Kermie, follow-up interview, March 20, 2024).

Kermie saw notated music as useful for some people, but also not necessary and even a potential hinderance for other ways of learning. For this reason, they felt it was important for choir teachers to help students develop a variety of skills useful in learning music.

Solmization and Aural Skills

Ms. Parker incorporated solfège into all parts of her choir rehearsal. Besides using solfège to sight-sing new scores, Ms. Parker skillfully integrated solfège syllables into how the choir learned repertoire. She used solfège to teach aural perception of intervals, as a mnemonic device for remembering sections of choral pieces, and as a way for students to decode difficult passages in written scores. Several students mentioned solfège in their journal entries. One student referenced solfège as an important tool for "finding your pitches yourself" (Anonymous student response, Optional Journal Entry #1).

For many students at Southeastern, learning by ear is another critical component of MI. Every student in each of Ms. Parker's choirs participates in the annual cabaret concert, a project

in which students create their own arrangements of popular music that they perform in small groups. Although some students preferred to download sheet music and work from notated scores, many chose to assemble the entire product by applying aural skills. In our interview, Kermie explained that they never used sheet music to prepare for cabaret. "We just listen to the song, record what we think are the melodies, and just learn our part that way" (Kermie, follow-up interview, March 20, 2024).

Part Independence

Participants also identified part independence as a musical skill related to MI. Ms. Parker described this skill as "being in the sound with others [while] independently holding your line" (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024). When I asked students in the journal prompt to describe what it means to be musically independent, four out of the nine responses mentioned the ability to hold their individual part while simultaneously hearing other vocal lines around them. The alignment of student and teacher perspectives regarding part independence suggests that it may be a key skill associated with MI in choir.

Expressive Skills

Based upon the data in the interviews and journal entries I collected, Ms. Parker and her students at Southeastern High School valued singing expressively more than technical skills such as music literacy and part independence. After open coding the data from all sources at this site, I found the greatest density of codes related to expressivity. In this section, I present evidence from both the teacher and student perspectives regarding expressivity.

Teacher Perspective

In our first interview, Ms. Parker described expressivity as "that next level of musicianship: dynamics, phrasing, tempo…Taking a phrase and making it truly musical" (SP,

initial interview, February 16, 2024). When I asked her if there was anything else important to understanding student expressivity, she answered by saying, "[expressive singers] filter [the music] through themselves in some way. [Expressive singing] is an inherently independent thing" (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024). Ms. Parker's responses to my questions pointed toward a definition of expressivity that is personal to each student, instead of something that is teacher-determined and unilaterally transmitted to the students.

Student Perspectives

Student participants from Southeastern High School seemed more inclined to speak about MI as it related to their expressive abilities than their technical skills. Kermie explained it succinctly, "Musical independence is about learning how to think and feel" (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024). As a follow-up, I asked Kermie how students might develop skills in musical thinking and feeling:

> If you don't speak a language, and you go to that country, you're gonna need a translator. But the thing about a translator is, they can say whatever they want, and you won't know if it's true or not…I think music is a lot like that, where a lot of people will define music exactly how they were taught music…With music, if you want to form your own opinion, you gotta listen to a lot of it, you gotta want to know what it is, and you gotta appreciate it…Musical independence is being your own translator (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

Through self-exploration of a variety of musical styles, Kermie found a way to independently develop their own thoughts and feelings about music.

Bats suggested in his interview that musical expressivity is a critical component of MI and intimately linked with personal identity. "I think [MI] means to find a way to make music

speak for you. The ability to create music with the people around you and by yourself is a way of mastering who people are" (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024). He also stressed that the means of music-making that people use are inherently personal. "A lot of people just like to strum their guitar, and that's their independence. It's going to be personal" (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024). Although Bats described the elements of MI as distinctly personal, he quickly connected MI back to how music can build social connections. "I think there's something very fascinating and special about the way that each person's own musical independence brings everybody together" (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024). His response suggested that there is a balancing of self and group that occurs when exercising expressivity in choral settings.

Interested in how expressive an individual can really be when singing in a choir, I asked Xavier how he maintained his independence while working toward a unified expressive interpretation in a group performance.

> I think that what needs to happen is that each person is independent in their own way of expressing what they're doing musically. And to become a group that can make a great sound together, you have to be independent first (Xavier, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

His response closely aligned with Ms. Parker's stated philosophy of encouraging students to filter the music through themselves. By developing a sense of independent musical expression, Xavier felt that he could best contribute to the choir's performance.

What Role Do Learning Dispositions and Agency Play in MI?

The ways in which Ms. Parker and her students described expressivity led me to carefully consider how learning dispositions and agency may be involved in how students develop skills related to MI. In particular, participants often described expressivity as a distinctly agential act.

In this section, I present data describing how Ms. Parker and her students experienced learning dispositions from my conceptual framework for MI such as reciprocity and resilience. Additionally, I consider new themes that emerged from the data, specifically how interdependence may relate to learning dispositions. Finally, I offer evidence as to how participants believed agency might function as a component of MI.

Learning Dispositions

Reciprocity

Ms. Parker and her students recognized the value of collaboration and viewed all members of the choir as resources for learning. Ms. Parker spoke about how she often relied upon students to help her guide the choir toward an expressive interpretation of the repertoire.

> It's great when they give you ideas, and you're like, "Oh, it is better that way." And I'm very honest with them about that…I'm not trying to project that I have all the answers all the time. I mean, [sometimes] I probably need to know my phrasing better, but I [can get] kind of stumped on whether we should carry through some moments or not. So, we sit down and listen to a couple of versions [of a song] over a few days, and I say, "Okay, let's decide right now and do it together." We feel it out, and then we mark it (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024).

By viewing students as resources for learning, Ms. Parker engaged her students in a partnership, helping encourage a sense of shared interest and responsibility in the choir classroom.

Students in the Southeastern High School advanced choir also shared experiences with me that suggested reciprocity was a key factor contributing toward their feelings of MI. Xavier described how students in choir shared their individual expressive ideas while singing with others.

[In this choir] I'm able to express myself and have feelings and then share those feelings with others. You're independent in the way that you think, and you act, and you feel, and you can share that with other people, and then they reciprocate it back. And I think that's exactly what we do here (Xavier, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

Xavier's perception of choir as a collaborative learning space is in alignment with Ms. Price's practice of involving students in expressive decision-making.

Kermie also described how accessing multiple sources of knowledge can help to create a spirit of reciprocity in choral music classrooms. In the following excerpt from our interview, Kermie explained how Ms. Parker's practice of bringing in choir clinicians from other schools and musical backgrounds provided them with a diverse range of knowledge and opinions from which to build their own set of musical ideas.

Some of the best things that I've ever been taught are from clinicians. Some of the worst things I've ever been taught [are from] the clinicians, but it's really good to have diversity in who's telling you what, to make sure that their sources are also diverse. If everyone had the same teacher, and they all became teachers, and they all taught the same, what's really being taught then? If we want to teach musical independence, we want everyone to have a voice and every voice to be represented as strongly or as accurately as possible (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

In this quote, Kermie explained that MI is best supported by multiple sources of knowledge, including learning diverse repertoire, and working with teachers, clinicians, and other students through a variety of musical experiences.

Resilience

Students in the Southeastern High School advanced choir also discussed how they developed a sense of resilience which provided safeguards for musical risk-taking. Xavier commented that trust in his choir teacher and his classmates helped him overcome performance anxiety.

> I feel fear, are you kidding me? I feel it all the time. Even when I go up, and I perform with these guys for the choir, I feel that fear. But [I know] that I can fall back on these people and that I have a connection with my choral director. I have trust in each and every single one of these people (Xavier, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

The support that Xavier felt from his teacher and fellow singers may also have strengthened his resilience and provided him with the resolve to work through failures instead of giving up.

> One thing that I had to learn was that when you fail, it's never the end. It's just the beginning of something new. It's learning to make those mistakes and then build upon them. That's where musical independence ties in, it's being able to have those failures and realize that you will grow from them (Xavier, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

In this comment, Xavier suggested that resilience was a key component of MI.

Interdependence

Like Xavier, Bats felt strongly supported by his choir teacher and classmates. He indicated that developing his own sense of musical independence was directly linked with the support system that he found in choir. The support system nurtured his sense of resilience and helped him recover from failures. But what Bats described to me transcended personal resilience and pointed toward a network of peer support and group-facilitated learning.

> It sounds counterintuitive, but working together helps with your own independence,

because if you try to do anything completely alone, you're gonna fail. [Watching] people doing the same thing but in such different ways in rehearsal sparked my interest in how I can make that process most meaningful to me. Working in groups [like choir] is a real eye opener for what it means to be independent, for what it means to fall down and look back at your buddies and they pick you right back up. That constant battle of trying to be better than you were is what music has taught me to do in my whole life. I think that's why it's so important to me (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

Bats' response suggested that interdependence may function as a learning disposition, empowering students' interest and resilience through the shared experience of the group.

Agency

In their interviews, Ms. Parker's students often mentioned their feelings of agency in their descriptions of musical independence. Students seemed to perceive agency as a state of balance between working collectively toward class goals and pursuing their own musical interests. As long as this balance was intact, they felt their MI was supported. When they lost all sense of agency, students reported feeling cut off from MI, leading them to resent the time they spent learning music. Bats described a time not too long before our interview when he felt that he'd completely given up his sense of MI, making music for other people instead of himself.

I was in the middle of honors choir, and solo & ensemble, musical theater stuff, my voice lessons, and college auditions— I was burned out, like bad. Music felt like something I had to do because everybody wanted me to do it. It was frustrating to have to work on something that I didn't want to be working on. That was probably the point where I was furthest away from my musical independence (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

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When I asked him how he recovered his sense of musical independence, he replied that he leaned heavily upon the support system of his teacher and classmates.

> I talked with Ms. Parker, and I talked with some of my friends in choir, and again, they brought me back up. [They helped me] realize that [choir] is important to me, and I was doing all these things for a reason. I kind of opened my eyes and I was like, "Okay, this is fun." That's an experience that I'll remember for a long time as a way of motivating myself to not really let myself get there anymore. I want to do the music that I want to do (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

Bats' description of this difficult time in his musical life is a helpful demonstration of the complex system of interrelated processes involved in MI. With his growth in skills came an increase in musical opportunities, in turn resulting in greater time commitments and practice expectations. The demands of his increased involvement led Bats to feel a loss of agency, which adversely impacted his perception of MI. However, the support system of his teacher and classmates enabled Bats' sense of resilience to sustain him through the most demanding period of his musical life. Bats emerged on the other side of this challenge with an awareness that sacrificing too much of his agency could lead to burn out. Through focusing on doing the music that he wanted to do, Bats believed he could best support his sense of MI.

Supporting student agency, however, may not always be as simple as inviting students to pick what music they want to study. In a journal entry asking students if choosing their own music to learn in choir was important to their perceptions of MI, one respondent stated, "I wouldn't know where to start if I had to choose my own, so I think me not making decisions is a good thing" (Anonymous student response, Optional Journal Entry #2). Bats suggested that there was a role for teachers in choosing repertoire that is appropriate for their choir to sing.

There should be a balance of music that you need to learn…and there's also importance in

choosing your own music. In choir, Ms. Parker chooses the songs. I mean, sometimes

we'll have a bit of say in it, or how we want to go at things, but we sing and learn them.

Some people like them, some people don't. It's just how it is (Bats, initial interview,

March 18, 2024).

For Bats, supporting agency is about balancing student voice and teacher expertise. This can

present a challenge for teachers as they decide when to take the lead and when to hand it off to

their students.

What Do Teachers Do That May Facilitate or Inhibit MI?

From my observations at Southeastern, Ms. Parker provided many opportunities for

student exploration, but she still assumed an active role in developing skills, nurturing positive

learning dispositions, and enabling student agency. In the next section of this chapter, I consider

the ways Ms. Parker's instructional decisions may facilitate or inhibit MI in her students,

presenting themes that emerged from anonymous journal entries, my field observations, and my

interviews of Ms. Parker and her students.

The Teacher as Producer

Ms. Parker's primary instructional goal was to encourage students to sing expressively.

When I asked her what her instructional priorities were as a choir teacher, she stated, "I've

always felt very comfortable getting after expressive musical elements…My ear immediately is

listening for if it sounds expressive and genuine" (SP, final interview, April 5, 2024). For Ms.

Parker and her students, expressive singing came from a process of collaborative analysis of the

music and text enacted through the lens of each choir member's personal interpretation. In our

first interview, Ms. Parker cited her extensive experience as a songwriter and performing artist as a major influence on her teaching style.

> I think that [my] experiences working on original music, or in a collaborative studio setting helped me think about how to bring those skills into a classroom. I really was drawn to the idea of what a producer does for the musicians and how I can do more of that as a teacher…Good producers, they're kind of like therapists for the musicians. They're [also] engineers and timekeepers, [they] have to not mess with anybody's head and make sure that things get done. As a producer, you have to offer solutions, but not be too critical, because that can freak musicians out a little bit. So, you're offering creative directions, and asking questions like, "What if we try this?" (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024).

Ms. Parker's experience working with music producers showed her another way to interact with musicians; it provided a model for a more facilitative approach that encouraged students to take an active role in musical decision making.

Leaving Space

One way Ms. Parker functioned as a producer in her choir teaching was to leave space for students to individually interpret the music they learned in choir. This can be a particularly challenging line for choir teachers to walk, given that conventional performance practice promotes a unified expressive approach. From my observations of the choir in rehearsal and in performance, the choir eventually arrived at an agreed upon interpretation. Although the ending performance had the appearance of a collective product, the process by which Ms. Parker led the choir to that interpretation was highly individualized. Bats described Ms. Parker's approach this way: "Ms. Parker is a great example of being very knowledgeable about so much but not over-

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explaining so that we don't have any room to grow. Because that's not independent—that's just listening" (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024). According to Bats, Ms. Parker skillfully balanced the need for expert guidance with opportunities for students to make their own expressive decisions.

I asked Kermie how Ms. Parker navigated this process in rehearsal, particularly with music which singers might interpret differently. This led to a discussion of a piece they recently performed, "Fix Me, Jesus," a song which Kermie initially expressed reservations in performing.

The moment I opened it, I closed it and I shut my eyes, and I was like, "Well, you're not singing this." I was so sick and tired of it. I felt like there was no diversity, like this was the whitest, boringest [sic] choir on the planet, and we can sound good as much as we want, we'll never sing something that has any real meaning. And of course, I was proven wrong (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

When I asked them about how their feelings for the piece evolved, Kermie replied:

She wanted us to think about the composer and the historical significance. The truth is, she can't tell you, "Okay, remember, when you were a kid, and this happened, and this happened, and the feeling you felt right there? That's the feeling you're gonna have in this song." That's not what she does. But she does give us a lot of context (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

Kermie went on to describe how Ms. Parker encouraged students to identify broader themes of loss, suffering, and redemption in this piece—elements of a shared humanity that transcended the explicitly Christian text. By decoupling the specific cultural and religious connotations from the piece, Kermie found personal meaning from a tradition of music outside of their own experience. Ms. Parker's approach of providing context but leaving space for her students to come to their

own conclusions supported student agency and independent decision-making within the confines of a group-oriented performance cycle.

Many Sources of Knowledge

Another characteristic of Ms. Parker's producer-like teaching style was her tendency to utilize a variety of opinions and experiences to inform the choir's approach to performance. During my time observing at Southeastern High School, Ms. Parker brought in a guest clinician from a local university to work with the choir on a piece that he had arranged. As a choir teacher with twenty years of experience and someone who has led a number of clinics in the past, I am familiar with choir teachers who are only interested in having clinicians validate what they are already doing. When I watched Ms. Parker stand by as the clinician worked with her students, it was clear that she was in a music-learner mindset, interested in honoring and amplifying the musical ideas of someone other than herself.

This same collaborative process was also evident in the way Ms. Parker sought to learn from her students. In our interview, Kermie mentioned that there was a time last school year when Ms. Parker asked a Brazilian exchange student in her choir to assist with a Brazilian piece they were learning. He taught them Portuguese diction, authentic performance practices, and made the piece relevant to students in ways that Ms. Parker could not. Although this may seem like an obvious way to recognize the abilities of people in the room, I have been in many choral spaces in which culture-bearers have been silenced by directors who are unwilling to give up the podium. Ms. Parker's willingness to enlist the talents of her students and colleagues contributed to feelings of agency and reciprocity, and played a facilitative role in supporting MI.

The Teacher as an Artistic Guide

Another potential factor in fostering MI was Ms. Parker's commitment to providing a rich variety of musical experiences in her curriculum. During my time with the Southeastern High School Advanced Choir, I had the opportunity to see three different units of instruction with different educational goals. The first week I observed, every individual student in the choir was learning a vocal solo for an upcoming class recital. During this unit, they also worked independently or in small groups to complete a music skill assessment from Ms. Parker's skill grid. In my second week of observations, the full choir was rehearsing for an upcoming concert featuring the music they were learning for the state music festival. In my final week, I saw students preparing for cabaret, a concert featuring small ensembles singing music that they chose, arranged, rehearsed, and staged on their own. In each of these learning activities, Ms. Parker's artistic ability served as an exemplary model for her students to learn from. Guiding students on a tour of musical experiences through a wide-ranging curriculum can provide varied opportunities to develop skills, dispositions, and agency that may contribute to MI. In this section, I present data relating to how each project may have contributed to or detracted from student feelings of MI.

The Solo Project

For this project, Ms. Parker allowed students to pick their own music, but most students chose from a list of five pieces of repertoire that Ms. Parker had selected from the state vocal music organization's required list for solo and ensemble contest. She made the decision to limit students' musical choices to pieces on this list—a list mostly comprised of music from the Western European canon—because this activity took place when some students were preparing for the state music organization's solo and ensemble contest. Despite this significant limitation,

being able to make some choices in the repertoire they sang still provided a degree of agency to students.

I watched Ms. Parker do a lot of vocal modeling during her instruction. She was careful to present her model as an idea from which the students could form the basis of their interpretation, but many students closely emulated her stylizations. Most of the rehearsal time was spent with everyone singing each selection as a class in unison, a decidedly teacher-centric and imitative activity. At the end of the unit, the students performed the pieces for each other in a class recital. In an effort to encourage students to develop a personal interpretation of the piece, Ms. Parker had each student imagine how the song's protagonist was responding in the music, and then incorporate their interpretation into a short character sketch. Bats mentioned this activity in our interview when I asked him about ways Ms. Parker fosters MI. "It's really fun to sit and listen to everybody's own interpretations of the song. We make up a story of what the song means to us" (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024). By encouraging students to create their own interpretations of the songs they learned in the solo project, Ms. Parker provided another opportunity for expressive freedom, something the students at Southeastern High School described as important to MI. Additionally, the solo project gave students an opportunity to build their confidence and skills by performing for their peers in a low-stakes class recital.

The Skill Grid

Another way that Ms. Parker included choice in her curriculum while helping students develop skills was through her use of a skill grid (see Appendix H). The grid allowed students to choose when and how they demonstrated proficiency in predetermined musical tasks. Although Samantha still decided on the appropriate skills for each of her choirs, students could choose to perform these skills alone or in small groups. They could also decide whether to submit a

recording or perform it live for Ms. Parker to assess. In this way, students could exercise agency in the way they developed skills that may be important to MI in choir.

Many skills on the grid had a practical application in choir, so as students completed tasks on the grid, they became more proficient at skills that they used during choir rehearsals. I also found that Ms. Parker often referenced the skills during class, highlighting the relevance of the skills to the authentic music-making practices of the choir. In one class period, I had the opportunity to watch a group of students working on a skill from the grid in a practice room. When I asked about their perceptions of the skills grid, one student commented, "I like that we can turn in recordings. That way we can practice the skill until we get it right" (Anonymous student interview, January 29, 2024). This student's response suggested that having a choice in how they were assessed may have encouraged them to work harder to turn in a quality product.

Choir Festival

District choral festival in this midwestern state is evaluated by four adjudicators, one of whom leads a clinic with the choir after their performance. There is also a sight-singing component in which the choir works without direct instruction from their teacher to sing through a set of exercises while a judge scores their process and end product. As I watched Ms. Parker rehearse the choir in preparation for the district choir festival, I saw the same style of fast-paced, teacher-centric rehearsal that I practiced for twenty years. At no time did I feel that Ms. Parker was unkind or impatient with her students, but these rehearsals had a business-like energy as she engaged in error-detection and correction. Although her efforts clearly improved the performance of the choir, there were few opportunities for students to try things on their own or offer their own interpretations of the music.

The students at Southeastern shared different feelings about their festival experience. Both Bats and Xavier felt that performing at festival provided potential benefits to their sense of MI. Xavier believed that performing in front of others, including judges, was an important part of developing confidence and forming his identity. Public performance gave him "that mental strength to be able to go up onto a stage in front of people and be able to be yourself and do what needs to be done" (Xavier, initial interview, March 18, 2024). When I asked Bats about his feelings of choir festival, he expressed that it was a fun opportunity to get feedback from the judges and learn how to improve the choir's performance.

> I think it's important to give yourself opportunities to look at where you are and see what you can do. [Judges are] helpful because that's what they're trying to do. They're not trying to be mean to you. If you have a lot to work on, you have a lot to work on. That's just how it is (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

By getting feedback from judges, Bats believed he could further refine skills that could be valuable to developing his sense of MI.

Conversely, Kermie described the festival experience as being stressful and potentially harmful to their sense of MI. They found that the rigors of concert preparation negatively influenced their impressions of the performance.

> When we're in the drilling phase, trying to get everything perfect, when our choir director is kind of like Gordon Ramsay sometimes, we're used to a little bit of criticism. Then when we get to the concert, and everyone just has such good things to say it can feel a little jarring, it can feel a little unreal (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

Kermie's comment about the regimented nature of such rehearsals suggested that Ms. Parker may place greater influence on technical skills when preparing for festival than in other

activities. Considered alongside the finding that students appear more likely to associate expressive elements of music with MI, the technical focus of contest preparation may inhibit feelings of MI in some students.

Cabaret

The cabaret project was the last instructional activity I observed at Southeastern High School. Months before the project began, Ms. Parker met with the choir council, a small group of students who helped plan concerts and events during the school year, to choose a cabaret theme. They brainstormed a list of possible songs that fit the theme and distributed these ideas to the entire choir as a list of suggestions. Choir students organized themselves into groups of four to eight and worked together to research, develop, produce, and perform a musical selection that fits the theme. At the end of the unit, Ms. Parker invited groups that were well-prepared and interested to take part in the evening cabaret concert.

During the cabaret project, Ms. Parker provided very little direct instruction. In a typical class period, she moved from group to group, asking leading questions and offering suggestions without making decisions for her students. Early in the process, when she detected areas for improvement in a group's performance, she would identify the issue for them and then provide some potential strategies for how to fix it. As the performance date drew nearer, Ms. Parker took a more active role, understanding that some groups needed more direct input from her if they were to have a successful performance.

Despite potential benefits to student agency, the lack of direct teacher guidance in the cabaret project may have been detrimental to some students' skill development and resulted in less time spent actively making music. I observed that some students grew frustrated and became complacent in self-guided rehearsals because they either lacked the skills or resilience to work

through difficult sections of the music without Ms. Parker's assistance. When I asked Samantha about what I observed, she commented:

> They can get very hung up on the idea that "We can't, we can't do this," or "We can't figure this out." Sometimes it takes a little more to convince them that they can figure it out instead of needing to wait for me to come navigate something (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024).

In her response, Samantha suggested that teachers may need to carefully balance how much assistance they give students so that they get the help they need without encouraging teacher dependence.

Student perceptions of the cabaret project, however, did not indicate that they felt frustrated or unsupported by their teacher. When I asked them about Ms. Parker's instructional style during the cabaret project, students described a process in which they were given clear parameters of what the project should look like (see Appendix I), class time to put it together, and guidance from their teacher when it was needed. Bats commented:

> Ms. Parker has a masterful way of giving us independence but being there along with us. She doesn't just throw us into the water and hope we can swim. We will be struggling with something, and she'll help us out and move us along, give us a point of reference to learn from instead of telling us what to do. If you're a teacher doing a cabaret [project], you could easily just tell your students how to do it. But she has a really unique and awesome way of teaching people how to do their own thing (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

When I asked students what experiences in choir contributed most to their feelings of MI, they all pointed to the cabaret project. Xavier answered my question this way:

[With] cabaret, you're in a small group of people and you're doing a piece of your

choosing. We have to be independent in the way that we go about and perform that piece

and learn it. [That's] not to say that in other aspects of choir there hasn't been

independence, but I think [cabaret] is the most important time (Xavier, initial interview,

March 18. 2024).

Xavier's comment suggests that the agency his group had to choose their own song, and the

student-centered approach taken in how they learned it may be factors that contributed to his

feelings of MI.

What Are the Contextual Factors That May Inhibit or Facilitate MI?

In my analysis of interviews, field notes, and journal responses, I considered potential

contextual factors (i.e., structural barriers) that may have affected Ms. Parker's instructional

decisions. Because a teacher's freedom to make curricular and instructional choices may impact

the ways choir students develop MI, I collected data related to how external influences (e.g.,

performance expectations, community and professional pressures) may have impacted Ms.

Parker's agency. I also asked students to consider how contextual factors may have influenced

how they developed MI. In the next section, I report findings related to contextual factors

involved in MI.

Contextual Factors Affecting Teachers

Performance

During my observations at Southeastern High School, students were consistently

preparing for and presenting public performances. Many students participated in the district solo

and ensemble contest in early February. The full choir presented a concert later that month,

followed by district choir festival in March, and then the cabaret concert in April. Each one of

these public performances had a material effect upon Samantha Parker's curriculum; the solo project coincided with solo and ensemble contest, the large choir rehearsals were to prepare for the choral festival, and the cabaret project culminated in a performance for the public.

Samantha reported that she was able to exercise agency in how she and her students engaged with performances. She did not face administrative or community pressure to compete in festivals, and the cabaret concert was something she created because she believed it to be educationally rewarding. Although she described the performance schedule as being within her control, she also expressed that preparing for concerts impacted the way she taught. In our first interview, Samantha commented on how teaching guitar was different than choir because there was no expectation for public performance.

> It's very freeing, relaxing, and fun to teach music with no concert. It feels great because you're not in the back of your mind constantly trying to fix things. You want them to be successful during the class, of course, but it's a lot more exploratory. You feel almost like a normal teacher because you don't have the same type of product you have to put out there (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024).

Samantha's comment suggests that her concern for the public's perception of a concert led her to spend more time "fixing things" than engaging in musical exploration. I inquired further and asked her to consider potential barriers to her own sense of agency in making instructional decisions. She answered:

> The main barrier is performance—having to put it in front of people and wanting it to sound good. You have your own conductor ego…it's going to sound how it's going to sound, so what do you do? There's lots of cool informal 'informance' styles of concerts, but I feel like that's more understood in elementary and middle school. Not many people

do that in high school…If parents could see a rehearsal, in a lot of ways it'd be way more impressive than a concert. [Choir] is a high-level class…but people don't really see it (SP, initial interview, February 16, 2024).

In this comment, Samantha suggested that the pressure to present high quality performances may cause her to focus on preparing her students for concerts instead of prioritizing activities that might better contribute to students developing MI. Later in the interview, when I asked Samantha if she would spend more time doing creative projects like cabaret in choir if there were not high-stakes concerts to prepare for, she agreed. From these responses, it seems likely that teaching choir to prepare students for public performances caused Ms. Parker to alter her instructional decisions in ways that affect how students develop and perceive MI.

Contextual Factors Affecting Student MI

When I asked students questions about potential contextual factors affecting their sense of MI, students identified aspects that both supported and constrained their feelings of MI. Specifically, students mentioned social connection as being a key contributor to their feelings of MI. The other contextual factor that emerged in student interviews and my observations is the way that festival rules and procedures may affect how students experience MI.

Social Connection

In their interviews, participants often discussed MI in a dualistic way: MI was something that was distinctly individual and simultaneously strengthened by the social support of the group. At Southeastern High School, I found a strong concentration of data related to social connection—it was the second most frequently encountered code to emerge from the data. Earlier in this chapter, I presented data that suggested participants believed social connections supported their learning by reinforcing key dispositions such as resilience and reciprocity. Other

comments from students suggest that a positive social connection may be an important contextual factor that supports how students develop MI. Xavier seemed particularly focused on this contextual aspect of MI. In our interview, he mentioned the intimate nature of making music with other people and referred to the choir as a family. Xavier explained the role social connection played in MI in the following excerpt:

> The music we sing is part of [my MI], but it's just one part, you know? The people are still there. And the feeling that I get every day when I walk into this classroom is still the same. Even if I don't like the piece that Ms. Parker chose, I still come in every day, because I feel tied to the people (Xavier, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

In this comment, Xavier suggested that social connections provide him with motivation to work hard in choir even when the musical selections do not inspire him. Other students spoke about how social connections supported their sense of MI. Bats believed that his MI in choir was enabled by the social support of his teacher and classmates. "Musical independence is bred from people around you being supportive and being knowledgeable and being musically independent themselves" (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024). Without this social network to provide intellectual and emotional support, Bats suggested, students may have more difficulty developing their MI.

How Festival May Affect MI

Large group choral festivals are governed by the social discourses advanced by state music organizations, shaping the context in which choir teachers and students operate. Some contextual aspects of this state's festival may support aspects of MI. Based on my observations, it seemed that the sight-singing component of festival was particularly valuable to building music literacy, a skill potentially involved in MI. The festival utilized a process in which the

teacher can establish the tonality and keep time while the group performs sight-singing excerpts, but all of the rehearsing, discussion, and preparation is student-led. Consequently, when I observed Ms. Parker preparing her students for the sight-singing portion of festival, she assumed a facilitator role. Students worked in pairs and small groups, using solfège and rhythmic syllable systems to learn the excerpts.

One student, Kermie, believed that there were contextual elements of festival that may inhibit their sense of MI by limiting the repertoire the choir sang. Kermie commented that although they were pleased that Ms. Parker had chosen to perform "Desh," a piece composed in a non-Western style, they were concerned that she might not pick a similar piece for festival next year. They believed that Ms. Parker might be reluctant to program music outside of the Western European classical canon for adjudication because non-Western music might be perceived as less important.

> I feel like sometimes certain music isn't allotted the same amount of patience. I was very scared for a while with "Desh" because we weren't always getting it right. Even when we did it perfectly, there was something better that we could do. I was worried that was going to discourage Ms. Parker from ever picking a song that's not English, or Latin, or Italian, or French, those repertoires that are considered super classical, super important, necessary to learn even (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

For Kermie, singing a diverse range of music was key to their feelings of MI. They perceived that some repertoires may be held in higher regard than others, leading choir teachers to favor Western European music for competitive events such as festival. In this way, contextual elements of state-sponsored music festivals may inhibit some students' sense of MI.

Interpretation

Through interviews and journal entries, Samantha Parker and her students reported how skills, dispositions, and agency were involved in musical independence. In this section, I first discuss Ms. Parker's instructional decisions and how they may contribute to student MI. Then, I investigate how underlying social structures may have influenced the way Ms. Parker and her students perceived and developed MI and consider the agentive actions they took to negotiate structural influences.

How Ms. Parker Encouraged MI

From my observations and interviews of participants at Southeastern High School, I concluded that Ms. Parker and her students shared a similar view of MI; it was rooted in an individual's ability to independently think and feel through music. Samantha encouraged her students to make musical decisions for themselves in a scaffolded and intentional way. In the solo project, Ms. Parker made many of the initial decisions for her students. She curated a repertoire list and modelled possible style choices, but she allowed her students to decide what song they would perform and what it meant to them. This scaffolded approach to building MI helped students learn skills through modelling while providing them with the agency to make interpretive decisions. By requiring the class to write a short narrative about their interpretation, Ms. Parker promoted the idea that successful musical interpretation requires intentional thought—a lesson she encouraged her students to apply in other musical situations.

Although preparing for large group festival was a noticeably less agential activity, it required students to apply many of the skills involved in the model of MI I observed at Southeastern High School. Students actively employed music literacy skills, part independence strategies, and critical listening skills to improve their performance. Preparing for festival also

seemed to reinforce the social connections in the ensemble, strengthening the bonds between choir members and encouraging learning dispositions such as reciprocity.

The last unit I observed, the cabaret project, served as a capstone that required students to apply the skills, dispositions, and agency they had developed throughout the school year. Agency stood at the forefront of this project in that students were asked to make all of the musical decisions, including what to sing, how to learn it (by ear or through notation), how to interpret it, and what to focus on in rehearsal. For some students, this amount of responsibility was daunting, particularly when they lacked the skills to solve musical problems on their own. When these situations arose, Ms. Parker intervened in her role as a teacher-producer, applying her expertise as a trained music educator and professional performer. In this way, Ms. Parker provided what Randles (2012) referred to as an "objective filter" to help students trouble-shoot problems in rehearsal and motivate them to bring their musical creations to a successful performance.

Through a curriculum of varied activities and carefully scaffolded opportunities for students to make musical decisions, I observed a multidimensional and interrelated system of MI at Southeastern High School. In Ms. Parker's choir, I observed agency as being interrelated with the other primary dimensions of MI—skills and learning dispositions. Specifically, agency interacted with reciprocity to serve as a catalyst for students developing skills related to MI. Reciprocity created an environment in which students saw themselves as valuable resources for learning in choir and resilience helped them persevere through musical and personal challenges, but it was their sense of agency was the key factor impelling them to act. When they engaged in music making on their own or with their classmates, they developed skills that in turn increased their feelings of MI. In this system, all three dimensions of MI (i.e., skills, dispositions, and agency) are of equal causal importance. In the absence of any of them, student MI was not fully

realized. For example, when students lacked skills to successfully rehearse on their own during the cabaret project, their sense of resilience was often eroded to the point that they became frustrated and disinterested in rehearsal. This suggests that finding ways to strengthen all three dimensions of MI may be necessary for students to become musically independent.

Structural Influences on MI

To examine how structures may have influenced Ms. Parker and her students' experiences of MI, I discuss how institutional structures (Scott, 2010) and community/professional expectations may have impacted both Ms. Parker's teaching practices and students' perceptions of MI. I also consider how Ms. Parker and her students may operate independently of structural influences. I situate my argument by using the typology of structures offered by Scott (2010) that I introduced in chapter one.

Institutional Structures

Some of Ms. Parker's classroom activities and learning objectives may have been directly influenced by structural influences. One example of structural influence in the choir curriculum at Southeastern was how state music organization ideals may have affected learning goals and activities. With the solo project, Ms. Parker created an activity that helped prepare her students for the state music organizations' solo and ensemble festival. Although she did not mandate that her students participate in the adjudicated contest, she still required all of her students to prepare solos for a class recital that conformed with the standards of the event. Because state music organization required lists historically privilege Western classical music (Kramer & Floyd, 2019), prevailing social discourses (Scott, 2010) that favored bel canto vocal style and Western classical repertoire influenced what music students sang and how they chose to sing it. Similarly,

large group festival, with its emphasis on sight-singing and traditional Western classical choral literature, may also shape the way students at Southeastern High School perceived MI.

Strict adherence to repertoire that promotes one tradition of music-making does not promote a broad range of skills or competencies and may serve as a structural limitation to how students perceive and develop MI. Students who only learn to make music in Western classical modalities may feel that other traditions that favor other skills such as aural learning or popular vocal styles are inferior to Western classical music. Students who do not enjoy Western classical music may become disinterested in a curriculum that does not represent their musical tastes or support their musical goals. Additionally, with an emphasis on expertly recreating past musical compositions, state organized music festivals incentivize music teachers to prioritize notational literacy and competency in Western classical styles. Because of these institutional pressures and rewards, teachers may prioritize notational literacy over other skills such as songwriting or arranging.

Community Pressures

In our interview, Ms. Parker suggested that "informances," informal presentations that show audiences what and how music students learn, may be a better way of promoting teaching practices that foster MI. She also commented that informances were generally not understood to be part of a high school curriculum, so she continued to present traditional choir concerts at Southeastern High School. With this response, Ms. Parker revealed how public perceptions of choir concerts affected her decision-making. The prevailing social discourse (Scott, 2010) defining what a choir concert should look and sound like influenced Ms. Parker to conform to aesthetic and procedural norms, even though she believed an informance might better represent the learning that took place in her classroom.

It also seemed that there may be community pressure at Southeastern High School to program music that conformed with Western European norms. This perspective emerged in my interviews with Kermie, the only participant who was from a non-Western cultural background. Kermie expressed to me a desire to sing more music from outside of the Western classical choral canon, specifically Arabic music, a representation of their culture. When I asked them why they thought Ms. Parker did not program more non-Western music, they suggested community expectations may have played a role.

> I feel like a lot of choir directors do what appeases the masses. And that's not always a bad thing, but I feel like we do that a lot here at Southeastern High School. We sing a lot of coronation masses. We sing a lot of Christian-themed songs…it just feels really repetitive sometimes (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

Recognizing the perspective of students who are not from the dominant culture is an important consideration for teachers who wish to promote an inclusive model of MI. In so doing, they may not only help underrepresented students feel seen, but they can also broaden the definition of what it means to be musical, providing a richer perspective of MI for all students.

Modes of Agency

Ms. Parker's decision to devote a portion of her curriculum to the cabaret project demonstrates how modes of agency (Scott, 2010) encouraged her to discard normative views of choir concerts in favor of an activity she found more educationally rewarding. Instead of a student-led performance experience, she could have chosen to present another traditional choir concert to her community. Her experience as a solo performer and songwriter may have granted her higher levels of reflexivity (Archer, 2007) that allowed her to envision musical opportunities beyond large-group choir concerts. By exercising her agency in providing an alternative to

traditional choir concerts and contests, Ms. Parker allowed her students greater agency to make musical decisions and engage in creative music activities. This observed relationship of teacher agency to student agency seems to be an important component of teaching choir in a way that fosters student MI.

At the same time, Ms. Parker included traditional choral events such as district choir and solo and ensemble festivals as important parts of her curriculum, even though she reported that her administration did not pressure her to have the choir participate in them. Certainly, her decision to continue these activities is partly based upon her belief that these festivals are educationally rewarding events that may also contribute to other components of MI. In our interview, she spoke highly of the state-wide performance assessment rubric, and she mentioned how contest results can help motivate students. It is also possible that the state music association, functioning as an institutional structure (Scott, 2010), influenced Ms. Parker's decision to participate in these events. Ms. Parker was highly respected in the state and much of that recognition came from her choir's reputation for outstanding performances at festivals. Whether it is her agential power or a structural influence guiding her decision to participate in adjudicated festivals is an open question—both explanations are likely to be causally efficacious. What is clear is that Ms. Parker's curricular and instructional decision-making is an on-going negotiation between structural influences and agential power, and one that may have material consequences on how her students develop MI.

Chapter Summary

At Southeastern High School, Samantha Parker provided a rich variety of performance-based activities that supported musical skills, learning dispositions, and student agency associated with how students develop MI. Each performance unit encouraged students to develop

different components of MI. Some projects, such as the solo project and choir festival, were valuable skill-building activities. The solo project encouraged students to refine their vocal technique and develop their own sense of personal expressivity in performance. Preparing for choir festival helped students hone their sight-singing skills, develop part independence, and strengthened social connections in the group. Student participants reported that these social connections created a system of support that encouraged reciprocity and resilience.

Although both performance-based learning units encouraged skill development and fostered positive learning dispositions, they may be less supportive of student agency. Ms. Parker actively pursued ways of encouraging students to develop their own individual expressive ideas about the music, but structural constraints that reinforced Western classical norms restricted student choice in what style of music they wanted to learn. Additionally, systems of rewards and sanctions put in place by the state music association may have influenced Ms. Parker to take fewer risks in what music she programmed, thus limiting the range of repertoire her students encountered.

The cabaret project offered students the most opportunity to exercise agency of all the projects I observed. Students chose what music they wanted to learn, created their own arrangements, and presented their performances with minimal assistance from Ms. Parker. Although they sometimes lacked the skills to effectively rehearse, and I observed that some students grew frustrated by the process, participants reported that cabaret was the most important activity in Ms. Parker's choir class for building their sense of MI.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION: CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Building a Community of Independence

Ms. Newcomer calls out to the class, "Ok, what note is do [solfège syllable]?" A chorus of treble voices responds, "A flat!" The students are seated in three rows in the classroom, each of them holding a single sheet of paper with a series of notated sight-singing exercises written upon it. Standing behind the piano, Ms. Newcomer rolls an A flat major triad, and the choir immediately begins singing a scalar pattern to establish the tonal center. After finishing the pattern, Ms. Newcomer moves on without pause. "Now we do the same three-part process, but remember that you are responsible for…" Her sentence ends with an upward inflection, prompting the choir to answer with the reply, "The whole thing."

Ms. Newcomer continues, "Ok, divide your time accordingly." Several students are talking to their neighbors at first until Ms. Newcomer reminds them, "This is the part where you're quiet." For the next minute, students sit quietly scanning the exercises on the page. After a minute passes, Ms. Newcomer asks the choir to sing do [solfège syllable]. Without hesitation, the choir accurately sings the tonic pitch. The teacher replies, "Cool. This is the part where you sing, now." Students begin working on their own, softly singing excerpts from the sheet. The room gradually fills with a cacophony of voices, all working independently on different sections of the sight-singing sheet.

Another minute or so passes and Ms. Newcomer announces, "Ok, now check it." Students organize into pairs or groups of three and begin to rehearse. I hear them sing through each section of the sight-singing sheet, discussing challenging intervals, and practicing rhythms. Watching the students work, some appear to be equal participants in the process. Other partnerships seem to be more "teacher-apprentice" in nature, in which a strong student leader

takes the initiative, and the partner sits back, either listening to their peer or silently audiating. Ms. Newcomer remains at the front of the class while the class works, letting the students take the lead in how they learn. After another minute or so, Ms. Newcomer asks for the choir to sing do [solfège syllable] again. The choir settles on the tonic pitch and the teacher calls out, "Ok, time for the whole sheet," and the choir begins reading through the exercises together. (CHS field notes, February 7, 2024).

The first time I saw Julia Newcomer lead a choir through this sight-singing process was at a state music convention a couple of years earlier. I was intrigued by her systematic approach and how she encouraged each student to take individual responsibility in the group's performance. Interested in learning more about her instructional goals and her views on musical independence (MI), I was delighted when she agreed to participate in this study along with her intermediate treble ensemble. The first week of my observations occurred before their performance at the district choral festival. During the other two weeks that I observed, the choir was preparing for Central High School's spring concert. At the end of each observation week, I sent journal prompts that students could choose to complete. Julia strongly encouraged her students to fill them out, and even allotted class time for this activity. As a result, I received many journal responses from Central High School, providing me with useful data from a large sample of the choir. Ms. Newcomer also helped me recruit four participants for semi-structured interviews.

Participants

During the time of this study, the first student participant, Beatrice, was a 10th grade, cisgender White female who sang first soprano in Central High School's intermediate treble choir. As long as she could remember, Beatrice had been involved with music. In our interview,

she mentioned that her mother, who was also very active in music, used to take her to early childhood music classes at the local university's community music school when she was a toddler. Around age four, Beatrice started dance lessons at a local performing arts studio and later participated in competitive dance. At the time I interviewed her, she was also taking private voice lessons, focusing primarily on musical theater and pop music styles.

Beatrice described her musical interests as diverse. She enjoyed listening to music of many different styles, including folk, singer-songwriter, pop, and country music, and was particularly drawn to songs with meaningful lyrics. At the time of this study, Beatrice sang soprano but also enjoyed singing other parts, especially alto for its harmony.

I really like altos, how they always get the harmony. I was an alto all of last year, and that was a lot of fun. [Singing alto] helped me find more harmony in music. Before, I couldn't sing low harmony. Now when I listen to music, I can find the low harmony, or if I don't hear it at all, I can make it up (Beatrice, interview, April 2).

The second participant I interviewed from Central High School was Beetle, an 11th grade, cisgender White female who sang second soprano in the intermediate treble choir. She joined choir in seventh grade after two years of playing in the school orchestra. When I asked Beetle how she ended up singing in choir after starting in orchestra, she explained that she switched her schedule so that she could be in class with her friends. After she joined, she realized that she really loved singing in choir, and she decided to stay.

Beetle described herself as a serious choir student, and told me that she planned to major in vocal music education in college. When I asked Beetle what led to her interest in music education as a career, she shared her past experience at a summer music camp.

I went to a music camp in the summer of 2022. That's when everything clicked for me. I

was in competitive gymnastics until May of 2022, so I never had time to think of choir

outside of school. But when I went to music camp, I decided that [choir] is something

that I want to continue to do for a long time. I realized I actually could do something with

choir in the future if I stick with it. I just had a really good time and realized why people

sing and why I sing (Beetle, interview, April 5, 2024).

Princess #12 was the third student I interviewed from Central High School. At the time of

the interview, Princess #12 was a 10th grade, cisgender White female who sang alto in the

intermediate treble choir. She grew up in a musical home; her father was heavily involved in

choir when he was in high school, and her stepmother was also a singer. Princess #12's first choir

experience was in an after-school choir she joined as a fourth-grade student in another state. The

experience made a good impression upon her, and she joined the school choir when her family

moved to the Central school district in fifth grade.

Princess #12 shared with me that she had experience singing other voice parts, including

first soprano and second soprano, but that singing alto was her favorite. When I asked her about

other music experiences outside of the school day, she said she mainly sang along with songs on

the radio or practiced choir music in her room. Curious about her creative habits, I asked her a

follow-up question about making her own music. She commented:

I think we all had that little patch when we were 10-year-olds when we were writing

songs, but that's about how far that goes. I don't know, I've never been good at the writing

part of it. Music theory is still something that I would like to get better at. Maybe once I

have a better understanding of that, it would be cool to write or come up with songs or do

covers or whatnot. But it's not something I do now (Princess #12, interview, April 5, 2024).

The fourth student participant, Silena, was a 10th grade, cisgender Indian American female who sang first soprano in the intermediate treble choir at Central High School. In our interview, she described a diverse range of musical interests that included experiences with Carnatic singing lessons, school orchestra and band, and eventually school choir. Although her first experiences with school ensemble music were in instrumental music, she lost interest when the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools to pivot to on-line instruction. So, when Central High School returned to in-person instruction, Silena decided to switch to choir.

Silena mentioned a long-time love of singing and music that began with participating in talent shows when she was in elementary school. For Silena, singing in choir was not only an opportunity to learn new skills, but a fun break from her rigorous schedule of academic classes.

I like to learn new music because I feel like it's like more knowledge, but it's also fun knowledge. It's not like school. Having choir as a class lets me learn and have fun in a class at school. Especially next year, in my junior year, I'll have really tedious AP classes, and I don't want my whole schedule to be filled with that. This hour will let me have something to look forward to in the day (Silena, interview, April 4, 2024).

In this chapter, I present findings from my analysis of field observations, class journal responses, and interviews with Ms. Newcomer and the four student participants from Central High School's intermediate treble choir. I organized this chapter by describing findings as they related to my research questions. I received a high volume of journal responses from students at Central High School, which provided me with a more comprehensive look at student perspectives from this choir than those from Southeastern High School. Additionally, I presented

codes and themes that emerged out of the data that may help explain underlying factors affecting student and teacher perceptions of MI. I closed the chapter by discussing these findings.

What are the Skills of Musically Independent Choir Students?

Julia Newcomer had a reputation of excellence among her peers for how she taught sight-singing. As I described in this chapter's opening vignette, she shifted most of the responsibility to the students, limiting her role to managing procedures and asking leading questions. During my time at Central High School, I had the opportunity to observe Julia's approach to teaching sight-singing and learn about what skills she and her students felt were most important to building MI.

Technical Skills

Notational Literacy

As I was getting to know Julia better during our interview, I learned that her music education began in band. Curious as to her thoughts about potential differences in MI between choir and band students, I asked her if she thought there were different skills involved with the two disciplines. In her experience, Julia found that notational literacy tended to be a skill more associated with instrumentalists than vocalists.

> Musical [notation] literacy is more of a requirement for instrumental music because [in choir] you can sing a pitch, but [in instrumental music] you have to know how to create the specific, correct pitch. And so, I find my students that come to me with previous instrumental experience are much more musically literate than people who have only ever done music from a vocal or choral aspect (JN, initial interview, March 1, 2024).

Perhaps in response to this perceived deficiency, Julia reported that notational literacy was the most important skill associated with MI in choir.

The ability for students to read and process data and then be able to turn that into a

musical action—it's a game changer. Then all of a sudden, you get to skip to the part

where we're making music and not the part where we're learning how it sounds (JN,

initial interview, March 1, 2024).

For Julia, notational literacy was a prerequisite for accessing other components of musicianship,

therefore it was a primary focus of her teaching.

Ms. Newcomer's students also mentioned notational literacy as a key component of MI.

In one of their first journal prompts, I asked the class what they thought it meant for a student to

be musically independent. One journal response read, "I think [MI] means to be able to read

music and perform on your own without assistance" (Anonymous journal entry, February 9,

2024). Learning to sight read using solfège was particularly valuable for Silena. Solfège

provided her with a way to understand relationships between notes and more accurately decode

and reproduce written pitches.

Before learning sight reading, I always had to listen to the music a lot of times before I

knew what to do. So, I think [learning to sight read] made me more musically

independent, because now I can listen to music maybe once and understand the basic idea

of it (Silena, interview, April 4, 2024).

In this comment, Silena suggested that notational literacy may aid her in learning music more

quickly by associating aural cues with notational symbols.

Some Central High School choir students viewed notational literacy more as a conduit to

MI than as a central component. Responding to a journal prompt about what it means to be

musically independent, one student wrote, "Being musically independent means you are able to

learn music on your own, and perform it. You can understand sheet music, or listen to a song to

be able to pick up on the musical system" (Anonymous journal entry, February 9, 2024). This comment suggests that learning by ear may also be a means to learning music on one's own. When I asked Beatrice about the role of notational literacy in MI, she described notational literacy as helpful, but not necessary to MI.

> Music literacy can be helpful [for building MI], but I don't think it's a necessity. If you're able to read music, then you can get a [faster] start at learning the rhythms, melodies, harmonies, [and] make connections to what the other parts are singing. You're thinking ahead, so it makes it a lot easier to be musically independent (Beatrice, interview, April 2, 2024).

With this comment, Beatrice indicated that notational literacy could support MI by providing an efficient way of learning notes and rhythms, but there may be other ways of learning music besides using notated scores.

Ensemble Skills

When I asked Ms. Newcomer about other skills involved in MI, she discussed how choir students need to understand not only how to perform individually, but also how their part fits into the ensemble as a whole. This includes skills like understanding dynamics, articulation, blend and balance, and the ability to self-correct. Ms. Newcomer also prioritized ensemble listening and score literacy so that students think of how their vocal line relates to the choir as a whole.

> We talk a lot about how you, as a musician, have to not only think horizontally but vertically. 'How do I know which part is singing with me?' or 'How do I get this note?' So, not just the horizontal line, but the vertical line (JN, initial interview, March 1, 2024).

Ms. Newcomer's students also commented on how learning to sing as a member of an ensemble was part of how they experienced MI. Beetle described how Ms. Newcomer taught the

choir to "look at the accompaniment too, and not just your line but the vertical alignment [of the parts]" (Beetle, interview, April 5, 2024). Beatrice spoke about other ensemble skills that may play a role in MI. In our interview, she mentioned intonation, explaining how a singer's sense of pitch could affect the choir.

> You have to be able to know when you're on and off the pitch. If you don't know if you're on pitch, you could be singing all the correct stuff, the correct rhythms, all the correct lyrics, but you'd be off from the rest of the choir. Being independent, you have to be able to know if you're in the middle of that pitch; if you're sharp, or if you're flat (Beatrice, interview, April 2, 2024).

Beatrice's comment suggested some skills that students perceive as part of MI may also be related to the goals of the choir.

Expressive Skills

Individual interpretation and expressivity also played a role in how Ms. Newcomer and her students viewed MI. In my analysis of the journal responses and interviews, I found Central High School students included expressivity in their definitions of MI more often than Ms. Newcomer did. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss both teacher and student perspectives of expressivity as a component of MI.

Teacher Perspective

Ms. Newcomer mostly discussed the attributes of musically independent choir students in terms of their literacy and ensemble skills and their rehearsal behaviors. When I asked her about how expressivity fits into the skills a student needs to be musically independent, she replied that students needed detailed knowledge of music vocabulary to support expressivity. "Being able to understand what the road signs mean as they're driving through a piece of music is an essential

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part [of MI]" (JN, initial interview, March 1, 2024). This comment implied that Ms. Newcomer's understanding of expressivity is related to how her students apply content knowledge such as terminology and score literacy to guide their interpretations of music.

Student Perspectives

Many students reported that expressivity was a key component of MI. In one journal prompt, I asked students if the class activities they participated in contributed toward MI. The lesson I asked them to reflect upon began with 10 minutes of sight-singing, followed by about 40 minutes of rehearsing repertoire. Of the 16 responses I received, seven described expressivity as an important part of MI. One respondent directly stated, "In musical independence, it's important to be able to express your music with your face and body" (Anonymous journal entry, February 9, 2024). Another said, "I find what we did today super helpful because it taught us how to tell a story" (Anonymous journal entry, February 9, 2024). A third response viewed expressive singing as a property of MI that may enhance the quality of their performance. "Being able to show expression is really helpful [to MI] because it makes the songs we sing more 'musically inclined' and makes them sound so much better" (Anonymous journal entry, February 9, 2024).

When I asked Princess #12 to describe MI, she gave a two-part answer that proposed both technical skills and expressive skills played a role in her sense of MI.

> I think it's the ability to really feel the music, and to understand the music. A part of that is understanding the rhythm and the notes and knowing what you're doing when you're looking at music. But I think a lot of it is also matching the emotions of the music; feeling the music and knowing what it's about (Princess #12, interview, April 5, 2024).

Later in the interview, I asked Princess #12 to describe what dimensions of MI were most important to her. She replied:

The technical stuff is the technical stuff. Everybody's learning that and everybody's doing

that. But feeling is really what like, punches it into the space, and that's kind of what

you're watching. Especially for somebody who doesn't do choir and doesn't read music

and whatnot, that's what they're paying attention to (Princess #12, interview, April 5,

2024).

I also asked students in interviews to describe times that they felt a strong sense of MI.

Beatrice told me about a recent performance at the district choral festival.

I felt the most musically independent when we performed at festival this year. I was

doing my part, but we were all connected. We were all together as one thing, but all doing

our own expressions. We were all having our own performances and we were connecting

with each other while still not being dependent on each other (Beatrice, interview, April

2, 2024).

With this comment, Beatrice suggested that it is the sensation of individual expression while

performing with others that contributed most strongly to her sense of MI.

What Role Do Learning Dispositions and Agency Play in MI?

Ms. Newcomer and her students often described MI as a set of rehearsal behaviors or as a

mindset toward learning in choir. Additionally, students explained how their sense of MI was

closely linked with the goals of the ensemble, while also stressing that individual decision-

making helped them feel more musically independent. In this section, I consider how learning

dispositions such as initiative and reciprocity, as well as student agency may factor into how

students at Central High School experience MI.

Learning Dispositions

Initiative

When I asked Central High School students what it meant to be musically independent, many students described behaviors or mindsets such as accountability, leadership, and initiative. One student wrote in a journal response that "being musically independent [means] always having things in your mind that you can improve on, being a leader for others, and challenging yourself to do new things" (Anonymous journal entry, February 9, 2024). Another student said, "If someone is musically independent, then they are able to correct themselves and identify errors in their own music. They can also follow a routine and complete tasks in music on their own or when leading a group" (Anonymous journal entry, February 9, 2024). These journal entries point toward both a set of individual skills and a willingness to exercise them as being part of MI.

Participants also explained in their semi-structured interviews how these student behaviors fit into their perceptions of MI. Beetle commented that taking initiative in one's learning was a key component of MI.

> My idea of a musically independent student is that they would get the music and start looking through it, marking things, and seeing what the song is about. And then they get a jumpstart on it because even just looking at it before you sing through it the first time can help a lot (Beetle, interview, April 5).

Beatrice described musical independence as a mindset in which students take the initiative to set their own goals and discipline themselves to stay on task in rehearsal.

> [To be musically independent] a singer has to be focused, and they want to [be focused]. If you're always goofing off and not listening, you're distracting everyone else…You

won't know your stuff, so you'll have to rely on everyone else. And you won't be able to

be connected to [the choir]. You'll be holding them back because you won't know what's

going on (Beatrice, interview, April 2, 2024).

In the comment above, Beatrice stated that the ability to maintain focus and stay on task is part

of MI and that these behaviors are related to a singer's responsibility to the ensemble.

Furthermore, she described failing in this responsibility as losing a connection with the choir.

Beatrice's statement on initiative suggests that, to her, MI includes the way one's actions and

abilities contribute toward or detract from the group.

Reciprocity

The sense of shared responsibility among Central High School choir students contributed

to a sense of reciprocity in the choir; students recognized that they and their classmates were

mutual resources for learning. In order for the choir to be successful, they had to contribute to the

group, and they had to balance their contributions with those of their classmates. Beatrice mused

that contributing to the group may even mean giving up some of her own independence in order

to advance the goals of the ensemble.

You have to be able to connect and listen, and you have to want to be heard as a

collective sound [and not be] heard over everyone else. To make that connection and

performance as full and amazing as it can be, you have to put the choir first...In a way,

you have to give up a little bit of your musical independence (Beatrice, interview, April 2,

2024).

Silena suggested that strong social connections between choir members may encourage a

sense of reciprocity in the group. When I asked her about the social environment in the choir, she

responded:

I feel like we as a class are all friends in a way. We're supportive of each other…I can just ask someone next to me, whoever it is, "What does this part sound like?" and then they will help me. I think that's really important, because if you don't have that [environment] it might be hard to learn (Silena, interview, April 4, 2024).

Through the support of her friends, Silena felt she could get help with her music whenever she needed it, creating a welcoming environment for learning.

Agency

Many students from the Central High School treble ensemble described how exercising agency in making musical decisions contributed to their sense of MI. In one of their journal prompts, I asked students if choosing the music they learned in choir made them feel more musically independent. Most respondents greatly valued being involved in choosing their repertoire. One student commented:

I feel like choosing the music that we sing can be good for feelings of musical independence. Having our director ask for our input in what we are singing makes me feel like part of the process and a valued member of the choir. Even if a song that I suggested isn't chosen, I still feel heard, and I know that my choice was considered. That helps me feel more motivated to learn whatever song we end up singing, and enjoy singing it more (Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024).

For this student, having a say in the music they learned increased their motivation, enhanced their enjoyment, and made them feel more invested in the music-making process. Besides boosting motivation and enjoyment, some students mentioned musical benefits to increased agency in repertoire decisions. One student wrote in their journal response that choosing music helped them figure out what works best for the choir musically. In our interview, Silena

described how choosing appropriate music for the choir was a skill that required both knowledge of the choir's musical ability and an awareness of what types of music they would enjoy singing.

> You have to really pay attention to what our choir would sound like singing these songs. I looked for how each song has balance with the different voices. I paid attention to that, to make sure that everybody was singing an interesting part (Silena, interview, April 4, 2024).

With this comment, Silena demonstrated that empowering students to make repertoire decisions can help them learn elements of programming music for choirs.

Not all students felt as strongly about the need to choose their own music in order to feel musically independent. One student wrote in a journal entry that choosing their own music was "not super important, but still nice. I think it is more important for musical independence to be able to sing and build skills independently" (Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024). Beetle reported that her sense of MI came not from choosing music to learn, but choosing to commit to the process.

> I think that being musically independent, in a way, doesn't matter if I like the song. If I take the time on my own, and make sure I'm focused in class and working on it, then I'd still say that's being musically independent (Beetle, interview, April 5, 2024).

Beetle suggested in this comment that agential action as a part of MI may be defined as a process in which students decide to exert the necessary effort to build skills, rather than the freedom to choose what music to study.

What Do Teachers Do That May Facilitate or Inhibit MI?

During my observations at Central High School, I had the opportunity to watch Ms. Newcomer prepare the treble ensemble for district choir festival as well as rehearse the choir for

a spring concert for parents and the school community. She conducted these rehearsals from the piano or from the podium and her students learned their music from seated positions using notated scores. Although these aspects I observed in rehearsals were consistent with traditional teacher-centric rehearsal strategies, Ms. Newcomer consistently strived to engage students in decision-making and problem-solving. In the next section of this chapter, I consider the ways Ms. Newcomer's instructional decisions may facilitate or inhibit MI in her students, presenting themes that emerged from anonymous journal entries, my field observations, and my interviews of Ms. Newcomer and her students.

The Teacher as Community Builder

When I asked Julia what her primary instructional goal was for her choir students, she answered the question with a two-pronged response:

> Community is the number one thing here. Team building and a sense of community are my primary goals, and I would say musical independence and musical literacy are my primary musical goals. So, we do a lot of things to create community and to foster good relationships between people. I fully believe that sense of community is what makes choirs good, having the ability to trust each other and feel safe to make mistakes (JN, initial interview, March 1, 2024).

For Julia, MI was a central goal of her curriculum, but she maintained that building relationships in the classroom must come first. Through creating an environment of trust and care, Julia believed students would feel safe to take the kinds of musical and intellectual risks needed to help them develop skills and behaviors involved in musical independence.

In my observations, I frequently saw Ms. Newcomer actively building community in the choir. Before class each day, she was interacting and conversing with her students, asking them

questions about their lives, and sharing stories of her own. This typically continued after the bell and sometimes well into the instructional period. From my perspective as an experienced public-school choir teacher, the classroom environment often seemed chaotic, with students and their teacher constantly engaged in back-and-forth banter. I sometimes grew uncomfortable as they talked rather than rehearsing music, thinking of the time that was spent socializing when they could have been learning music. But what was revealed to me, over time, was a culture of care and musical curiosity in which students were actively involved in their learning and emotionally committed to each other.

Team-building Activities

One way Ms. Newcomer built community was through team-building activities such as "Tiny Victories" and "Fri-yays." Fri-yays happen on Fridays when the choir has met the musical goals for the week. Instead of rehearsing for the entire period, they take time to play a team-building game. These activities give students an opportunity to interact with their classmates in a non-musical way that encourages them to work together and develop trust in each other. "Tiny Victories" happen at the beginning of class every Friday. Students grab a sticky note from a pad on the piano and write something from their week that they want to share with the group. Julia explained:

> "Tiny Victories" allow students to share who they are as individuals. Some are more willing to tell you every single thing that happens in their life, and some of them are not. And that's one of the ways that "Tiny Victories" allow those students who are not keen on telling the whole class [about their lives] a chance to do it. Sometimes they're super silly, like "I got a latte this morning," but sometimes they share that they got into college with a huge scholarship and they're super excited about it. But you know, we all are humans,

and I think the relationships that we build [through these activities] help us to be willing to trust each other (JN, follow-up interview, April 11, 2024).

In our interviews, Central High School choir students often mentioned Ms. Newcomer's focus on building community in choir. Beetle explained the importance of community to developing skills in choir by comparing it to her experience in orchestra.

Choir just feels right when there's a community. If there's not a community when you're singing, it's hard to put your voice out there every time you sing. In orchestra you can blame it on, "oh, my string was out of tune" or something, but when you're singing you don't have anything. It's just you (Beetle, interview, April 5, 2024).

Beetle's comment suggested that because singing is an activity that can make people feel vulnerable, it can be difficult to practice and develop skills if there isn't a sense of trust and community in the classroom.

Building Musical Leaders

Besides building teamwork through non-musical activities, Ms. Newcomer encouraged students to take ownership in how they learn music in choir. One example of this is how Julia approached teaching expressivity. When I asked her about her process for teaching musical interpretation, she described a collaborative process of trying ideas and discussing them as a group. "We talk about, 'How do you hear this? What do you think about this?' and we'll try those out, giving students the ability to hear it and then hear what they think" (JN, initial interview, March 1, 2024). As part of the process, she encouraged her students to use the text to help guide their expressive ideas. "What do you feel is the most important word in this sentence? Let's sing that. What does that sound like? What do we think?" (JN, follow-up interview, April 11, 2024).

Princess #12 described how Ms. Newcomer's approach to teaching expression allowed students to take ownership in the music and interpret it individually. This focus on individual expression contributed to Princess #12's sense of MI, and she believed it enhanced the overall quality of the performance.

> She lets us decide a lot of it on our own. She asks [us], "How do you feel when you sing this song and how do you express that?" One of the reasons it works so well is because everybody's having their own personal experience with it. It's not her telling us how to feel, she's letting us feel on our own. And that's what brings it (Princess #12, interview, April 5, 2024).

Interdependence

By building a strong sense of community in the choir, Ms. Newcomer created a sense of shared accountability among its members. Students learned to depend upon one another and view the ensemble as an interdependent network for learning. Julia did this not only through building relationships, but by modeling ways to practice that encouraged students to work together to find solutions to musical problems. One of the most pronounced examples of how Ms. Newcomer encouraged interdependence is in how she taught sight-singing. Julia described the process in the following way:

> We spend a lot of time practicing things out loud, to not only help you put concepts in your own mind, but to help those around you as well. There is a huge team element of choir performance that is part of independence because we have to be able to trust each other to make music. The teamwork elements of choir and the trust elements of singing together are just different. Maybe that's not independence, but codependence (JN, initial interview, March 1, 2024).

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When I asked Beetle about how sight-singing fit into her perception of MI, she explained how Ms. Newcomer's teaching gave students the skills and strategies to guide their own learning.

> When I think of musical independence, I think of the way our teacher teaches us sight reading. When she gives us a correction, she doesn't just tell us, "Oh, you need to fix this," she'll stop and give us examples of how to fix something. We learn how to practice on our own so that once we go off [and practice] by ourselves, it's up to each of us to put as much effort as we want into it (Beetle, interview, April 5, 2024).

By developing individual student skills and creating a community of trust, Ms. Newcomer fostered both a strong sense of student MI and a choir of interdependent musicians working together to learn music.

Potential Inhibitions to MI

Although I observed many aspects of Ms. Newcomer's teaching that seemed to support MI, I also saw some instructional decisions that may impede students in developing MI. In this section, I consider how Ms. Newcomer used the piano during rehearsals and her decision to use pre-recorded practice tracks for students to learn their vocal parts.

Using the Piano in Rehearsal

When I observed at Central High School, I was surprised to hear the treble choir only rehearse accompanied music. In teaching this music, either Ms. Newcomer or her part-time accompanist was stationed at the piano. When students encountered sections of the music that they needed help on, they would ask Ms. Newcomer or the accompanist to play the part for them on the piano. Each time they asked, the teacher or accompanist complied. At no time during my three weeks at Central High School did I observe students using the skills that they learned in preparing sight-singing exercises in how they learned their music for performance.

I asked Julia about how she used the piano in class and if students ever had the opportunity to apply the skills they learned in sight-singing exercises to learn their concert music. She replied that although I hadn't had an opportunity to see her use solfège in teaching repertoire, she did teach some music using solfège in the fall. She also explained that because this was only her second year in this position, and that students had become used to singing accompanied music in the past, she found herself programming less a cappella music than she had at her previous position.

> The introduction of acapella singing here has been a challenge because they haven't had that experience. There are still times when we do a piece a cappella and they're like, "Wait, we're gonna do this without a piano?" I think pianos have their blessings and curses in choral music because it's a crutch in some ways. So, there's an element of me trying to work more a cappella singing into the curriculum (JN, follow-up interview, April 11, 2024).

Although the lack of a cappella repertoire at Central High School could contribute to an overreliance on the piano, it may also be that the daily practice of playing their parts on the piano has dissuaded students from using notational literacy skills to learn their choir music.

I also asked students about their music literacy and how they would evaluate their ability to independently learn their concert music. Princess #12 mentioned that she'd like to be more skilled at reading music notation, but that for now, she is dependent upon Ms. Newcomer to learn her music.

> I'd like to be able to read music, pick up music and be able to see it. That's my big goal. But I'm not there yet, and I wouldn't say I'm super close. There's a lot of [rehearsals] where she's playing the notes, and I'm singing the notes, but I don't exactly know what

the notes are. I guess that could prevent me from learning (Princess #12, interview, April

5, 2024).

Silena talked about how Ms. Newcomer used the piano for teaching voice parts, identifying what

was helpful and potentially unhelpful for developing MI.

I think at times, the piano could get in the way [of MI]. It's not like our teacher plays the

whole part for us while we're singing, she just plays it if we ask for extra help. So, I think

that the piano does help for musical independence most of the time. But if, for example,

the piano was just playing our part, like really loud so that I could hear it, and I didn't

know what to sing [without it], I feel like it might stop my musical independence a little

bit (Silena, interview, April 4, 2024).

When I asked if the choir used solfège to learn concert music, Silena replied that they did, but

that it was infrequent.

Sometimes we work on our music using solfège. I don't remember doing it that much,

though. I think that using solfège at times would be really helpful. It would put more of

what I learned from sight reading into the actual music (Silena, interview, April 4, 2024).

With this comment, Silena offered that making more explicit connections between what they

learn in sight reading exercises and the literature they sing for concerts might be helpful in

becoming more musically independent.

Using Vocal Tracks to Teach Parts

One way that Ms. Newcomer helped students learn their parts in choir was by using pre-

recorded vocal tracks for them to listen to. She purchased these tracks from music publishers and

then uploaded them to the school learning management system so that students could access

them digitally from school or from home. By using vocal tracks to learn their parts, students can quickly memorize the pitch patterns and rhythms through repetition and imitation.

I asked students about their use of vocal tracks and how they thought it might contribute or detract from MI. In the following excerpt of my interview with Princess #12, we discussed how she practiced challenging music on her own.

Ben:

When you get frustrated trying to learn a challenging piece, how do you approach it? What's the practice plan on trying to figure that sort of thing out?

Princess #12:

Vocal tracks, mainly. Singing along with the tracks and looking at the music and knowing what this jump actually is. Because it's usually never as bad as I think it is. And if I just practice it a few times, then I know what I'm supposed to do.

Ben:

So, do you have practice tracks for all your music?

Princess #12:

Usually. We don't have practice tracks for [songs] that aren't too difficult. And then when Ms. Newcomer plays it, I can get it.

Ben:

So, let me ask you this: How would you independently figure out that music without your teacher or without the practice tracks?

Princess #12:

I don't really know because I've never had to approach it from that angle. I'm not good at the piano. I don't know how to play. I would try my best to figure out the key it's in, and

once I know the key, I can usually do the solfège if I know where do [solfège syllable] is at. Sometimes I'll write out the solfège for the song, right under the notes. So, I'd probably do that (Princess #12, interview, April 5, 2024).

In this excerpt from our interview, Princess #12 reported that she used vocal tracks or Ms. Newcomer's help from the piano to learn her choir music. She described how she used a combination of listening to the vocal track and following along with her music to associate the sound of an interval with how it was notated. She also divulged that she did not have much experience in learning music without these tools. However, she also explained that she could use solfège to figure the music out independently. This infers that by relying on vocal tracks or the help of Ms. Newcomer, Princess #12 may refrain from using strategies that could enhance skills associated with MI.

Silena recounted in our interview how vocal tracks increased her sense of MI. She described how she and her peers used practice tracks [vocal tracks] in sectional rehearsals to work independently, without the help of their teacher.

When we use the practice tracks, we go to separate rooms, and we work on it ourselves. And at least for our group, we listened to the practice track a couple of times, and then did it by ourselves. Then when we did it with the practice track, we realized we were doing things wrong. So, I think that also built musical independence because we didn't have to rely on anyone else to help. But sight reading is also good for musical independence. I don't think one is better than the other (Silena, interview, April 4, 2024).

Silena's comment proposed that both practice tracks and sight-singing were valuable tools in building skills related to MI.

What Are the Contextual Factors That May Inhibit or Facilitate MI?

After analyzing journal responses, student and teacher interviews, and my field notes, I identified potential contextual factors (i.e., structural influences) that may have impacted how Central High School students develop skills, dispositions, and agency involved in MI. Because contextual factors may impact teacher decisions, which in turn may affect student learning, I also considered how these factors may have influenced how Ms. Newcomer fostered MI in her students. In the next section, I investigate how underlying social structures affected Ms. Newcomer and her students and the agentive actions they took to negotiate these influences.

Ms. Newcomer: Keeping up with the Joneses

In our interviews, Ms. Newcomer described to me how external pressures from the community, school administrators, and her music department colleagues may influence the activities she promotes for her choir students. She reported that the Central school district and the music department were both highly competitive, and that stakeholders valued distinctions such as having all-state choir participants and exemplary choir festival results.

> You don't want to be the wheel of the music department that doesn't turn. If the band and the orchestra are going to solo and ensemble, and to large ensemble festival, and to all state, etc., you don't want your community to think, "Well, why is the choir not?" It's a very competitive academic district. There are a lot of students, or maybe their parents, who like to have a feather in their cap to show that their kid was a four-time all-state honors choir singer. We always try to keep up with the Joneses, I guess. Some of that [pressure] is retention. You don't want kids to not take choir because they will be able to get more feathers from the other music courses that the district provides (JN, follow-up interview, April 11, 2024).

Although she acknowledged the influence of stakeholders, Julia also believed that many of the activities she promoted held educational value for her students.

> Would my life be easier if I didn't take time out of my life to help my students audition for honors choir? Yeah, my life would be easier. But I went through that program in high school, and that program was formative to me as a musician. I wouldn't want to deny those kids the opportunity because it takes too much time out of my life (JN, follow-up interview, April 11, 2024).

Julia's comments point toward how she negotiated both structural influences (community, school, and professional pressures) and her own philosophical values in deciding what activities to prioritize in the Central High School choir program. Prioritizing activities such as all-state choir, solo and ensemble contest, and large-group festival shaped what type of musical opportunities her students received, which in turn may have influenced student perceptions of MI. Next, I consider the differences in instruction during festival preparation and spring concert rehearsals, and how that may affect how students develop and perceive MI.

How May Festival Rehearsals and Spring Concert Rehearsals Impact MI?

Preparing for Festival

In our first interview, I asked Ms. Newcomer how the festival process may affect how she teaches skills related to MI. Her response focused on music literacy and sight-singing, answering that although she spent more time preparing sight-singing during festival, the process may lack authentic application to student learning in choir. This is because she believed that the exercises that the state music festival used to assess beginning and intermediate choirs in sight singing were not real-world applicable.

In the fall and in the winter, [we teach sight-singing] as a rehearsal skill and not as, "This is specifically how they're going to ask you this question on the test, so let's make sure we're prepared to answer it correctly." I don't feel that it is real-world applicable as written. So, [in the absence of festival] I think I would focus more on using musical literacy as a specific literature teaching tool and not from the perspective of "Here's 25% of your festival grade. Let's get as many points as possible" (JN, initial interview, March 1, 2024).

Julia's statement implied that festival changed the way she taught sight-singing, which may affect how students develop MI. Festival encouraged her to teach skills that adjudicators would score the choir upon, even if she didn't believe them to be real-world applicable.

When I asked students if they felt rehearsals were more or less focused on musical independence when preparing for festival, I received a mix of responses. One student commented in a journal entry that they "consider [festival rehearsals] to be more focused [on MI] because we have sight reading which I think builds musical independence" (Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024). Another student journal response stated, "I consider them to be less focused on musical independence, because you're working on blending your sound and working together as a group" (Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024). Both of these responses suggested that festival may be a contextual influence that affects how students develop MI.

Other journal responses inferred that the influence of an external audit may impact student feelings of MI. One student wrote, "I think festival is less about musical independence, because our teacher is more focused on getting as much as we can right for festival" (Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024). Another said, "Festival prep was more focused on us building musical independence since we REALLY (emphasis in original) had to get almost

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everything musically possible right since that's what we were going to get judged on"
(Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024). These responses point toward different student
perceptions of MI; one was more focused on musical freedom, whereas the other prioritized
musical precision.

Preparations for Spring Concert

I noticed a change in pace, intensity, and instructional activities between how the choir
rehearsed during festival preparation versus their rehearsals for the spring concert. First, after
festival ended, I did not see the choir practice sight-singing, a skill that Ms. Newcomer and many
students agreed helped to facilitate MI. Also, after festival, I did not see the choirs learn music in
a way that drew upon skills that they learned through sight-singing. When students had an issue
with notes or rhythms, they simply asked their teacher to play it for them on the piano. Based
upon the evidence I observed, participating in festival may be a contextual factor that encouraged
Ms. Newcomer to spend more time teaching sight-singing, which in turn could help students
develop skills involved in MI.

I also noticed that Ms. Newcomer took a different approach in teaching the repertoire
after festival, spending less time on technical details, and rarely stopping to coach expressive
elements in the music. When I asked students about differences in the rehearsal approach
between festival and spring concert, many commented on how rehearsals were less stressful after
festival. One student wrote in their journal response, "When preparing for festival, we were more
serious and tried to fix even the nitty-gritty things in rehearsals. Now we are a little more laid
back" (Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024). Another said, "[Rehearsals] were a lot higher
stakes, and a lot more serious for festival" (Anonymous journal entry, March 8, 2024).

In our interviews, I asked participants whether festival rehearsals were better for developing MI than the rehearsals leading up to the spring concert. Beatrice suggested that festival rehearsals may benefit students in how they grow in musical skill, but that preparing to perform for adjudicators may have a detrimental effect on MI.

> I enjoy [festival]. I like getting feedback on what we did well, what we didn't, what we need to improve on and what their opinions are on how we do that. I like to see all of it and use that to grow individually as a choir. But I think that if we were to do it constantly, we'd lose a little aspect of being musically independent, because the goal of festivals is to get the perfect score and show everyone what we can do…With the arts, you can express yourself, and if you're constantly being judged on someone else's opinion of music, it makes it harder to be expressive (Beatrice, interview, April 2, 2024).

In the statement above, Beatrice implied that festival adjudication may impact her ability to freely express herself, thus detracting from her sense of MI.

Interpretation

Through their interviews, journal responses, and my observations, Ms. Newcomer and her students provided a multidimensional perspective of MI. Some of the data from Central High School suggested an alignment between teacher and student perspectives on MI. For example, Ms. Newcomer and her students shared similar views of the role of community in choir, and how that may support students becoming musically independent. There was also evidence of misalignment in teacher/student perceptions of MI—particularly in the different ways they described music learning modalities (i.e., music literacy v. learning by ear). In the next section, I interpret findings related to my conceptual model of MI and consider potential structural impacts upon how students develop MI.

Developing Skills

      Ms. Newcomer and her students agreed that supporting notational literacy is a key component of MI. From my analysis of the data, there is evidence that participating in festival may contribute to teaching practices that help students become better sight-singers, a skill that may be associated with notational literacy. Student interviews and journal entries indicated that sight-singing is an activity strongly associated with festival, but the skills that students develop to prepare for festival adjudication may not transfer into their regular choir routines. Ms. Newcomer's comment that festival sight-singing exercises aren't applicable to real-world music learning may have some merit, but the ability to associate notated pitches with solfège and rhythmic syllables is a transferrable skill that can help students decode written music themselves, without the help of the piano or vocal tracks. Teachers should make explicit connections to solfège or other notation decoding strategies in rehearsals so that students can more plainly see how the concepts are applicable to the music they learn in class.

      Another important discussion emerging from the data is the role of notational literacy in Ms. Newcomer and her students' perceptions of MI. In our interviews, Ms. Newcomer suggested that fluency in Western musical notation was the most important skill involved in how choir students become musically independent. This viewpoint may have arisen from social discourses (Scott, 2010) that define the success of a choir by its ability to perform already composed music. Freer (2010) identified this limited definition of success as a major obstacle to implementing progressive, less notation-dependent pedagogies in choir, such as improvisation. Similarly, Ms. Newcomer's hierarchical focus on notational literacy as a learning goal may have limited how her students perceive and develop MI.

Interestingly, despite her stated philosophy of stressing notational literacy, there is a strong component of aural learning in Ms. Newcomer's teaching. During my time at Central High School, I watched her teach literature exclusively from the piano, except for when students were using pre-recorded practice tracks to learn their vocal parts in sectional rehearsals. Careful application of pedagogical methods may help students differentiate and develop skills in both notational literacy and learning by ear. For example, when Ms. Newcomer's goal is to help students apply their notational literacy through sight-singing, she might use the piano sparingly so that students have the opportunity to audiate and decode notation without hearing the pitches played for them. When the goal is to improve aural skills so that students can learn more efficiently by ear, Ms. Newcomer may consider rote learning strategies that encourage students to learn their vocal part from a holistic musical context instead of isolating a single vocal line and imitating it repeatedly.

It is also notable that neither Ms. Newcomer nor her students spoke much about creating music as a skill involved in musical independence. The conspicuous absence of creative music-making in the Central High School choir curriculum may be the result of their performance-centered agenda. Ms. Newcomer suggested in our interview that in an ideal curriculum, she would be more likely to include individual creative projects. When I asked her what the best way to assess MI in her students might be, she answered:

> Having them as an individual perform and create something, to be the one that's responsible for having made all of the musical choices and to learn the notes and the rhythms and the things. Having them do that as an individual, instead of hand holding, or doing it with the dependency of the people around you, or being bound to the decisions of the group (JN, follow-up interview, April 11, 2024).

Next, I asked her if she thought there was room for this type of activity in her curriculum. She

replied:

> Easy answer, yes. Difficult answer, as a performance-based ensemble and a performance-
> based curriculum, I'm not sure if I have the capacity to create that yet. But I think it's
> something that we can find space for or maybe make more space for (JN, follow-up
> interview, April 11, 2024).

These comments suggest Ms. Newcomer felt a lack of agency in her instructional decisions due

to the structural constraints of performance expectations. Prioritizing music activities that

promote the quickest and most efficient way of preparing the ensemble for performance may

limit the types of skills students can develop and shape their perceptions of what it means to be

musically independent.

Nurturing Learning Dispositions

By focusing on building community in the choir classroom, Ms. Newcomer created a

system of social support that reinforced key learning dispositions. Students viewed each other as

resources for learning, a central principle of reciprocity, a key learning disposition included in

my conceptual framework. Ms. Newcomer also fostered a culture of comfort and confidence,

leading to individuals to take responsibility for their own learning. Beatrice explained:

> [Ms. Newcomer] helps us all feel confident…She's brought us into this community where
> we're all comfortable with each other and we feel comfortable to ask questions when
> we're confused. She lets us all be our own leaders (Beatrice, interview, April 2, 2024).

Activities such as Fri-yays and Tiny Victories may also encourage a sense of playfulness

in the choir. This sense of light-hearted fun permeated all activities I observed during my time at

Central High School. Ms. Newcomer also encouraged playfulness in her daily interactions with

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the choir, stopping rehearsal to tell a funny story, or letting a student share something from their day. Because rehearsals were imbued with a sense of play, each class period I came to visit seemed joyful, energetic, and centered on a love of music. Princess #12 echoed this sentiment in our interview. "I think all of the voice parts are in tune and work well with each other. [We have] a mutual understanding of loving music, and then translating that into doing music together, because we love the music" (Princess #12, interview, April 5, 2024). By maintaining a playful learning environment, Ms. Newcomer created an environment where students are motivated to engage in skill-building activities that can contribute to their sense of MI.

Enabling Agency

Ms. Newcomer provided many opportunities for students to make decisions in choir, including letting them choose repertoire for the spring concert and working collaboratively to make interpretive decisions in choir. Finding ways to encourage students to express themselves individually in choral settings seems to be particularly salient to their reported feelings of MI. This can be a challenge when a choir is working toward a unified interpretation of their music. Ms. Newcomer's approach seemed effective at getting the choir to agree on an overall interpretation while still leaving space for individual expression. Finding that balance may be one of the most important factors to supporting student feelings of MI.

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Chapter Summary

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At Central High School, Julia Newcomer created a community of learners that supported each other in developing skills and learning dispositions related to MI. She also actively promoted student agency through a collaborative approach to making interpretive decisions and by giving students a voice in repertoire decisions. However, some of Ms. Newcomer's

instructional decisions, including her use of the piano in rehearsal and lack of creative music-making may limit the types of skills students develop that could enhance their MI.

Students reported that they felt the most musically independent when they were encouraged to make their own expressive decisions. They also described how Ms. Newcomer taught them skills such as sight-singing to help them develop a sense of MI. Some students commented that they wished they had more opportunities to practice music literacy skills with the music that they learned for performance. Making more explicit connections between sight-singing exercises and the repertoire may further contribute to how students develop skills relate to MI.

Structural constraints (Scott, 2010) such as festival guidelines and performance expectations may limit some of the curricular offerings at Central High School. Ms. Newcomer reported that the pressure to prepare for performances and conform with her instrumental colleagues at Central High School may prevent her from making instructional decisions that may best support MI in her students. Finding ways to circumvent structural barriers encountered in music education spaces may enable more learning opportunities for students to develop their sense of MI.

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION: NORTHERN HIGH SCHOOL

MI as a Curricular Approach

"Zee-zeh-zah-zoh-zoo…" Wanda Fox's rich and vibrant mezzo soprano voice echoes in the cavernous classroom. A choir of sixteen singers stands on the risers, looking down at their teacher in front of them. She is modeling how to phonate in head voice for her students and encouraging them to imitate her open and resonant vowels. As prompted, the choir echoes her, albeit somewhat hesitantly at first. Ms. Fox seems to pick up on their reluctance as she tries another approach, "Look across the room. Choose a partner and inspire them." The students giggle for a moment, but soon settle on their partners for the exercise. Wanda models again "Zee-zeh-zah-zoh-zoo," her voice rising to the final vowel. She takes a low breath and gestures for her students to reply. This time, the choir responds with a full and sonorous tone. Sixteen freshman treble voices, engaged with breath, ring out across the room. Satisfied, Wanda now sings the same set of vowels, beginning on the fifth scale degree and descending to the tonic on the "oo" vowel. The choir echoes in reply. "Was that better or worse?" Wanda asks. Students energetically respond, "Better!" "Yes, WAY better." "Definitely an improvement." Seemingly satisfied with their responses, Ms. Fox continues with the warmup.

After the choir has finished vocalizing, they transition into sight singing practice. Each student holds a sheet with rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic sight singing exercises written upon it. Ms. Fox starts their preparation by asking some leading questions, asking the choir for the time signature, key signature, and starting pitch. She moves over to the piano, establishes G major as the tonic key, and sings "do" [solfège syllable]. The choir joins her, then proceeds to sing an ascending and descending scale in G. Without a word, Ms. Fox transitions to Curwen hand signs. The choir begins singing, moving up and down the major scale by step, following

their teacher's hand signs. Next, she starts them on leaps of a third. The leap "re-fa," trips a few

of them up, and Ms. Fox repeats the gesture a few times until they accurately sing the interval.

"Ok, split into section circles," Ms. Fox calls out, and the choir begins to work on the exercises

in small groups. Wanda moves through the classroom, providing them with strategies, but not

answers. As student groups work through the sheet, I hear many struggling with the same "re-

fa" interval that they had missed earlier. This time, working in groups, the students realize their

error, and take a moment to "step through" the interval, singing each pitch between the notes to

check the interval for accuracy. (NHS field notes, February 19, 2024).

Wanda was well-known throughout her state for her contributions to choral music

education, particularly for her work helping to revise the rubric for adjudicating choirs at district

and state music festivals. When I reached out to her to see if she was interested in participating in

this study, she enthusiastically agreed. She was eager to learn more about her students'

experiences with musical independence (MI), particularly those in her beginning treble

ensemble. My first week observing Wanda's beginning treble choir occurred during their final

preparations for district choral festival. The next time I came to visit, the students were engaged

in a small-group folk song project (assignment guidelines included as Appendix J). During this

instructional unit, students chose songs from a list of options that Ms. Fox provided for them.

After they chose their piece, groups went into practice rooms and worked together to learn notes

and rhythms. The unit concluded with each small group presenting information they learned

about the song from online research, and then performing the piece for their peers during class.

In my final observation window, the choir was preparing for a spring concert for the community.

At the end of each week, I sent journal prompts to students that they could choose to complete.

Because Wanda earmarked some of her instructional time for students to respond to journal

prompts, I received many responses from Northern High School, giving me plentiful data from a broad sample of the class. Ms. Fox also helped me recruit four participants for semi-structured interviews.

Participants

Angel or Devil (hereafter, Angel) was the first student participant I interviewed from Northern High School. At the time of this study, Angel was in ninth grade and a cisgender, White female. Angel had a lot of experience studying music, including taking piano lessons from an early age and singing in a community children's choir. Her parents were active musicians, particularly her mother, who played piano, cello, and sang.

Many of Angel's early music experiences involved singing and playing piano at church events. Her father was a pastor, and she and her mother often made music together at church. Angel described how church music and her participation in the community children's choir helped her to develop confidence as a singer.

> Being in church all the time, I did a lot of singing, and I think the reason I became so confident with it was because I always sang with my mom, and I couldn't really hear myself. So, I always kind of thought I sounded like my mom. But when we found out about the children's choir, we decided to get me to that. That's when I really started to realize, "Oh, my gosh, this is how you sing" (Angel, interview, April 8, 2024).

Didi was the second student I interviewed from Northern High School. At the time of this study, Didi was a freshman, cisgender, White female who sang in the beginning treble choir. Didi was very active as a performing arts student. Along with Angel, she had been in the community's children's choir from a young age, was involved in theater, and had taken several years of dance lessons. When I interviewed her, Didi was taking private voice lessons and singing in both Ms.

Fox's beginning treble choir and a co-curricular choir that met before school on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Didi's family was not heavily involved in music. Her mother had dabbled in theater during high school and her grandparents were in a church choir. When I asked her what inspired her to be so involved in music, she cited her experiences in the children's choir and an influential music teacher named Miss B.

> I think that it was the children's choir I sang in. I did summer camp there when I was in first grade, over the summer. I really liked it. I loved learning songs and all about solfège, learning the hand signs. When I was in about third or fourth grade, I was still in the children's choir outside of school, and Miss B. was my teacher. She was always very encouraging. I think Miss B. was a huge part of my love for music (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

Peeta was the third participant I interviewed from North High School. She was in ninth grade, enrolled in the beginning treble choir, and a cisgender, White female. While in middle school, Peeta played the clarinet in the band and sang in choir, but she quit band before her freshman year of high school. At the time of this study, she was also involved in competitive rowing as well as track and field.

Peeta's parents weren't involved in music, but her older sister played French horn in the band. Peeta described her parents as supportive of her music study, including paying for private voice lessons. Peeta found great joy in learning more about her singing voice and felt a sense of musical fulfillment when working with her private voice teacher. I asked her how studying voice compared to learning to play the clarinet.

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Singing is more fun [for me] because I have control over my voice. I can add vibrato and change the tone quality. I like the softness of the voice and how I can make it belt, too. I feel like for clarinet, you're either good, or you're getting there. But for vocal music you can add more and make it your own thing. You can sing your own way. Clarinet, it just sounds the same (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

The last student I interviewed at Northern High School was Arekusu, a ninth grade, cisgender, Asian-American female who sang soprano in the beginning treble choir. Although her family wasn't involved in music, Arekusu had been in choir since fifth grade, when her parents moved the family to the Northern school district from out-of-state. When I met her, she was also studying martial arts, taking both jiu jitsu and taekwondo at a local dojo.

Arekusu described herself as very studious and always interested in working ahead, something she also liked to do with her choir music. Though she enjoyed practicing on her own, the most important part of being in choir for Arekusu was the social connections that she formed with other people in the choir. She described for me how her experience singing in the all-city choir ignited her passion for choir:

Singing in [all-city choir] made me feel connected, like I belonged there. I just like being united with everyone. Even though we have a lot of things that are different from each other, as soon as we start singing, we have some type of bond like we've known each other for a long time (Arekusu, interview, April 12, 2024).

In this chapter, I present findings from my analysis of field observations, class journal responses, and interviews with Ms. Fox and the four student participants from Northern High School's beginning treble choir. I organized this chapter by describing findings as they related to my research questions. Additionally, I presented codes and themes that emerged out of the data

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that may help explain underlying factors affecting student and teacher perceptions of MI. I closed the chapter by interpreting and discussing these findings.

What Are the Skills of Musically Independent Choir Students?

While observing at Northern High school, I saw Ms. Fox leading many different activities to help students build musical skills. Students filled out music theory worksheets, played partner games with rhythms or key signatures on notecards, and practiced sight singing in small groups and with the full ensemble. I also observed Ms. Fox's students use solfège to learn pitches and numeric systems to count rhythms while they rehearsed the repertoire they were preparing for performance. Finally, I watched the students work in small groups to learn a folk song that they chose, rehearsed on their own, and then later performed in class. In the next section, I consider data related to musical skills from my observations, journal entries, and my interviews with Ms. Fox and her students.

Technical Skills

Notational Literacy

For Ms. Fox, teaching notational literacy is a key component of fostering MI. She described MI as students being able to take ownership of their music learning and stated that fluency in notated music was a critical part of MI in choir.

> When we say musical independence [it means] that they don't need me, but they make decisions based on information about what they're singing and hearing. [It's] understanding what they like about it, what they don't like about it, and how to potentially make it a little bit better. It does require literacy as the foundation (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

Because so much of the music they study in choir is transmitted via notated music, Wanda explained, students needed to understand the symbols to be able to engage with the content on their own terms. When I asked her to specify what literacy skills students needed to be musically independent in choir, she replied:

> [They need] to be able to read that musical map, which is so important. Being able to find the different voice parts versus the accompaniment, being able to identify foundational rhythms in common, duple, triple, six-eight time, and being able to count in those meters. [Also], being able to identify a key signature in major and then from there, understanding how to figure minor keys, too (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

I asked students in a journal prompt to describe what it meant to be musically independent. Of the 14 responses I received for this prompt, seven mentioned notational literacy as an important skill. One student wrote, "Musically independent means being able to read music without relying on help from a friend, teacher, or website" (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). Another student replied, "To understand and comprehend a piece of music without hearing it first. To be able to look at a piece of music and read the solfège and time signature easily" (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). In both responses, students specifically identified reading music as central to MI.

The students I interviewed also believed that notational literacy was a critical component of MI. I asked Didi what specific skills students needed to have to be musically independent. She replied:

> Being able to understand music theory, which includes the key signatures and solfège, the bar lines, all the different symbols like crescendo, decrescendo, all the different types of dynamics, mezzo forte, forte, all those things, and to be able to understand the piano.

That way, when you look at a piece of music, and you see all the different types of symbols and things, you can understand those and put them into sound (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

I also asked Peeta about skills that students practiced in choir and how those might be involved in MI. She commented that sight singing was important to musical independence because it helped singers perform with confidence.

Sight reading definitely plays a big part in being musically independent. Then you can actually sing confidently on something you've never been taught and be independent in that music (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

Using Resources

Several participants commented on how they developed skills and abilities in choir that enabled them to access resources for learning independently. One resource that students learned to use in Ms. Fox's choir was the piano. During my observations at Northern High School, I saw students working on their own and in small groups using laminated images of a piano keyboard with the pitches written on the keys. They used these learning aids when filling out interval and note identification worksheets, and they used them in practice rooms when rehearsing at the piano. I asked Wanda about her decision to teach her students basic piano in a choir curriculum. She replied:

There is something about hearing students say, "Hey, can I just have a practice room where I can just kind of plunk things out?" They're trying to figure out a melody that they've heard, and that's wonderful. As a singer, we don't have that spatial ability to put it in our fingers. Piano is really the best way to do that. So, I think that that's helpful (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

Wanda's students also saw value in learning basic piano skills. In a journal prompt asking about class activities that supported MI, one student commented, "I think that learning things off of a piano keyboard was helpful, because it not only helped me learn how to play basic notes on the piano, but also helped my singing abilities" (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). Didi mentioned in our interview how Ms. Fox taught the class about the piano and how she used it in developing skills related to MI.

> Ms. Fox is basically teaching us how to play the piano. I've always wanted to learn that and it's so different than I've ever been taught. Even though it's hard for me, I know it helps me learn my notes. Once I do, it just feels so good, and I feel so successful about it (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

Didi suggested in her comment that Ms. Fox's instructional decision to teach students how to use the piano in rehearsal was a valuable resource for learning music on her own.

The piano skills that Ms. Fox's students developed also influenced how they worked together in sectional rehearsals. When I observed students working in practice rooms, there was always a student at the piano, providing starting pitches or playing short passages from the music. I asked these students if they studied piano privately, and although some did, many said they developed their piano skills from what they learned in Ms. Fox's choir class.

What Role Do Learning Dispositions and Agency Play in MI?

At Northern High School, Ms. Fox and her students mentioned additional factors like curiosity, initiative, and confidence as being part of MI. They also discussed the role of agency and decision-making in becoming musically independent. In this section, I consider how learning dispositions such as curiosity and confidence, as well as student agency may factor into how students at Northern High School experience MI.

Learning Dispositions

Musical Curiosity

In my first interview with Wanda Fox, she explained how curiosity was a central component of MI.

> Musical independence is also having a curiosity for other kinds of music, styles of music, but also self-discovery of what my voice can do. What kind of things do I like? What draws me in? What speaks to me? Then [students] can make choices down the line with some sense of understanding of why they made that choice (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

When I asked Wanda how she encouraged this sense of musical curiosity, she mentioned Jams. Jams was a class activity typically held during the first five to ten minutes of choir every Friday that allowed students an opportunity to share some of their favorite music with the rest of the choir. Ms. Fox had each student send their selected song to her ahead of time as a YouTube link, along with a baby picture. From these submissions, Wanda created a digital slide with the link to the song so that she could share each student's selection with the choir. After the song played, students would try to guess who chose that particular song for Friday Jams. At the end, Ms. Fox would reveal the identity of the student by projecting their baby picture on a separate slide. Besides it being an opportunity to learn new music, Wanda mentioned that it was a valuable opportunity for her to get to know her students better.

> [Jams is a chance] to get to know students and for them to find common ground with their colleagues about music, artists, and things that speak to them. But it also helps me know that social emotional piece. What do they turn to? What is it that inspires them?

What did they like? And [they] tell me why that is. So that's kind of maybe a bonus; that

wasn't the intent (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

By giving students a chance to share their musical interests, Ms. Fox provided an opportunity to

cultivate musical curiosity, build community, and learn more about each other.

In our interviews, some of Ms. Fox's students also mentioned a sense of musical

curiosity. Arekusu explained how musical curiosity led her to explore making music on her own

outside of choir class. When I asked her if she made music on her own, she told me about how

she explored songwriting using skills she learned in choir.

> **Arekusu:** I get on the piano and I play these little random notes and I try and make a
>
> song without lyrics. I haven't gone into too much depth yet, but I try to put lyrics with it.
>
> **Ben:** Okay, do you use the things that you learned in choir to do that?
>
> **Arekusu:** Yeah, like, some of the keys are major for happy moments and for sad
>
> moments you would go to minor (Arekusu, interview, April 12, 2024).

Other students described how curiosity supported their sense of MI and enjoyment in

choir. I asked Didi about other factors that were necessary for students to be musically

independent. Didi remained curious about her choir music by adopting an open-minded approach

to music learning.

> You can't go into choir with preconceived notions about the music that you're going to
>
> learn. If you decide, "Oh, I don't like the song already," then you're not going to like it.
>
> But if you decide to be open-minded, you have a greater chance of really enjoying what
>
> you're doing (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

Initiative

Wanda used the word ownership to describe how students took initiative for independent learning. She believed she supported student ownership by teaching students specific skills to use in sectional rehearsals. In our interview, she described how she spent time at the beginning of the year teaching students how to rehearse in sectionals.

> At the beginning of the year, we figured out how to do [sectionals]. What do you need, how to work together, what resources, etc. Sometimes it's a train wreck and a struggle. But they want to take that ownership and go and do that [on their own], and then come back [to the large-group rehearsal]. We'll see, it might improve, it may not. But they've taken that ownership (WF, initial interview, February 26. 2024).

In this comment, Wanda suggested that teaching students the skills necessary to rehearse in sectionals may not always be the best way of learning notes, but it may help to develop their sense of ownership in the learning process.

Many students spoke about the value of sectional rehearsals to developing their MI. Some saw sectionals as a developmental step toward MI. When I sent a journal prompt asking about class activities helpful in developing MI, one student commented, "Doing sectionals has been a huge help. I know it's not totally independent but it's helping us get there" (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). Responding to the same prompt, another student remarked on how sectionals gave them a chance to practice skills involved in MI on their own.

> An activity that I feel helps us to become more musically independent is when we get to work with each other in our small groups and we have time outside of the classroom without our teacher present to help us (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024).

By learning how to work in sectionals, Ms. Fox showed her students ways that they could extend their music learning beyond the boundaries of the teacher-led choir rehearsal.

In their journal entries, other students explained how initiative supported their sense of MI. When I asked students to describe what it meant to be musically independent, one student responded, "For me, being musically independent is doing stuff without being told, like writing stuff in our music without being told to, doing crescendos and decrescendos, etc." (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). Another student wrote, "I think [MI] means to love music and practice it when it is not required" (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). These comments suggest that students may feel more initiative when they enjoy the music they are singing and feel empowered to make expressive decisions.

Arekusu also believed that musically independent students study music without being told, taking initiative to learn ahead of schedule. This means taking notes in their music, writing in solfège and rhythmic counts on their own to speed up the learning process.

> MI means studying your music without being told. When your teacher says, "We can do this next week," you're like, "No, I want to do it this week." I like to get a head start; write the solfège in, write the measure numbers, and the beats of the rhythm. I also try to make little symbols that mean something like, "Oh, we should go over this," or "Oh, this tune isn't right" (Arekusu, interview, April 12, 2024).

When I asked Arekusu about what supported her initiative for learning music, she mentioned that singing songs she liked encouraged her to work on her own.

> I think it's just having a passion for music. When I find songs that I take an interest in, I research them. I even try to play them on the piano so I can show them to my family and friends (Arekusu, interview, April 12, 2024).

Confidence

I also found that many students believed being confident in their musical abilities strengthened their sense of MI. In their journal entries, six students specifically used the word confidence to describe MI. One wrote, "I think that being musically independent is being confident in your singing abilities and being able to learn a piece without any help" (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). Another said, "You can sing confidently and strongly. You rarely need help and have very beautiful musical skills" (Anonymous journal entry, February 23, 2024). A third entry mentioned specific skills related to music literacy, such as "be[ing] confident in sight reading, singing, finding notes, etc." These comments suggested that confidence supported both cognitive skills like music literacy and performance skills such as vocal technique.

For Peeta, being musically independent meant having the mindset to confidently contribute one's voice to the choir. "[Being musically independent] is being sure of your abilities and how you can add to the choir. It's how you can make your impact confidently and add your own piece to the music without going overboard" (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024). Peeta's comment also suggested that choir students must negotiate their role within the ensemble, being careful not to stand out from their peers by "going overboard." Angel described how confidence was interrelated with her sense of MI.

> I've had a lot of low self-esteem, and when I accomplish things in music, when people recognize me, when people see me, I'm like, "Oh, my gosh, that's so nice." Being able to sing for people or play for people and them liking it really helps my musical independence (Angel, interview, April 8, 2024).

In this comment, Angel suggested that musical accomplishments and public recognition helped to build her confidence which made her feel more musically independent.

Agency

I also found that agency was an important factor in how Ms. Fox and her students described MI. In their journal entries, many students explained how agency contributed to their enjoyment of learning music in choir. When I asked them to reflect on the folk song project, one student wrote, "I think that choosing your own piece makes it easier and more fun to practice musical independence. This is because you almost have a personal connection to the music, and it feels more fun to rehearse" (Anonymous journal entry, March 15, 2024). In responding to my prompt asking how important choosing music to learn was to their sense of MI, another student explained:

> If I don't like the song that I am singing or if it is too easy my brain starts to go on autopilot and it's hard to focus. This means [that choosing my own music to learn] is extremely important to my musical independence (Anonymous journal entry, March 15, 2024).

This student suggested that having a voice in what music they sang not only helped them enjoy it more, but that choice also played a role in being appropriately challenged.

Peeta agreed that agency was an important part of MI. She believed that having a say in the music they learned in choir would improve the quality of their performances. "I think we definitely need a choice because a big part of making it sound good is if we enjoy it. Putting our choice on the songs would just make the music quality a lot better" (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024). Arekusu had a slightly different perspective on the role of student agency in choosing music for choir. In our interview, she explained:

It's a balanced scale for me. If you choose your own music, you might not get to know

about pieces that are popular in other cultures. But sometimes I might enjoy making

music more if we sang songs that we listen to outside of choir, too (Arekusu, interview,

April 12, 2024).

In this quote, Arekusu stated that being able to choose the music that they learn in choir may

increase her interest and contribute to her sense of MI. But she also said that having the teacher

choose the music allowed the choir to learn about new kinds of music that they otherwise might

not get a chance to learn. This comment suggests that a balance between student and teacher

agency might be necessary to maintain student interest and expose them to new musical ideas.

What Do Teachers Do That May Facilitate or Inhibit MI?

Through my observations of rehearsals, student interviews, and journal entries, I gathered

data concerning how Ms. Fox's instructional decisions may have supported or constrained

student MI. In the next section of this chapter, I consider the ways Ms. Fox's instructional

decisions may have facilitated or inhibited MI in her students. I discuss Ms. Fox's choice of

curricular activities, examine the way she presented musical concepts to her students, and present

themes that emerged from anonymous journal entries, field observations, and interviews.

Factors Supporting MI

A Place to Belong

In our first interview, Ms. Fox told me that she chose many of her classroom activities to

build a sense of community among choir members. Creating an inclusive environment where

students felt a sense of belonging through music was Wanda's primary goal. She explained:

Having a place to belong, and having a family that grows together and experiences things

together is first and foremost, and we do that through musical encounters. Whether that's

playing fun games, getting-to-know-you kind of things, or being in music theory groups

of all skill levels, we're all working together to solve a musical puzzle (WF, initial

interview, February 26, 2024).

When I asked Wanda if this sense of belonging played into her model for MI, she replied, "I

think the two are connected, because part of it is taking a risk, and not always having to have the

answers right. So, you need to have that safe space" (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

By cultivating a sense of community, Wanda believed that she could make choir a safe space for

the risk-taking and experimentation she believed to be necessary in building MI.

Arekusu also spoke about how a sense of belonging contributed to her feelings of MI.

She told me in our interview that singing in a choir gave her the confidence to try new musical

skills. Arekusu described that supportive environment in the following way:

It makes me feel connected, and I feel like I belong…Even though we have a lot of things

that are different from each other, as soon as we start singing, we have some type of bond

like we've known each other for a long time" (Arekusu, interview, April 12, 2024).

Arekusu's comment above suggests that a sense of belonging may support a classroom

environment that facilitates student MI.

Variety of Musical Experiences

Ms. Fox incorporated many different musical activities in her curriculum. Students

commented on how activities such as the folk song project and music theory packets contributed

to their MI in different ways. One student wrote about how the folk song project contributed to

MI in a journal entry, saying, "[Learning the folk songs in small groups] contribute[d] to my

feelings of musical independence by helping me build my own songs and harmonies and

teaching me how to figure out my style of finding music" (Anonymous journal entry, March 15, 2024). Another student reflected on how each of the activities I observed contributed to MI:

The folk song project definitely helps with musical independence because we have to learn the music on our own with only a little help from the teacher. The festival wasn't a big factor, but it does help us feel proud of what we do. Music theory helps independence because if we know our theory and methods, we can sing and play almost anything, in my opinion (Anonymous journal entry, March 15, 2024).

By offering opportunities to learn different skills and practice on their own, this student believed Ms. Fox supported their sense of MI.

Potential Inhibitions to MI

Throughout the semi-structured interviews and journal entries, students remarked that some of the ways Ms. Fox taught them their choir music limited their sense of MI. They described how their teacher's skill-based approach may neglect other dimensions of MI such as personal expression through music. Students also reflected upon Ms. Fox's use of repetitive drill strategies in instruction, and the differences between learning by ear and through notation.

Solfège Before Lyrics

Ms. Fox followed a specific process in teaching notes and rhythms to each section of the choir. She asked students to count out the rhythms, sing their part on solfège, transition to a neutral syllable, and then sing the text. When I asked her about this process, she explained that it was her way of encouraging music literacy.

They count the rhythm, sing the solfège, sing it on a neutral syllable, and then sing the text. They get to that neutral syllable part, and it's like, "Wait a minute, you know how to do this." Well, it's because they really weren't reading the music. They were reading what

they had written in, which is good, but it's just a first step in the process (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

This process continued until Wanda had determined each section was secure on notes and rhythms. During my observations at Northern High School, I saw that students were asked to sing their parts on solfège sometimes for weeks at a time. According to students, spending weeks of rehearsal without engaging with the lyrics greatly impeded their sense of MI. When I asked how Ms. Fox could alter her instruction to increase student feelings of MI, Peeta answered:

> I feel like it would just be easier [to feel musically independent] if we focused on the emotional connection from the beginning. Instead of focusing on the solfège, one measure at a time, we should listen to the song first. Talk about what the song is about, then sight read through it as a group. Counting "one and two, and tee," that doesn't help me get the material and love it (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

Peeta's response suggested that more focus on the lyrics and less on the technical aspects of the song may help her maintain interest and develop an emotional connection with the music. Didi also commented on how Ms. Fox's focus on literacy may reduce student engagement, causing students to be frustrated.

> We always start with the rhythm and the solfège. I would rather listen to a choir sing the piece, understand what the piece is about, and then go into it. It would make me a lot more positive about what we're doing, rather than just starting with solfège and with notation. I look around [the class], and everybody's zoned out when we start with notation (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

Didi's reported lack of engagement may create an obstacle for her and her classmates in acquiring skills related to MI.

Only Angel seemed to find Ms. Fox's process to be effective at supporting her sense of MI. She believed that frequent repetition of the notes and rhythms was the best way for her to build the skills necessary for MI.

> We repeat things. We do it again, we learn the notes, we do solfège, we run solfège and learn the solfège. Learning notes should definitely come first [before learning the lyrics]. For me, it's about repetition. Maybe finding a few notes on the piano, then fixing it, talking about it a little, practicing it, and hearing it again, singing it again. And again (Angel, interview, April 8, 2024).

Getting Stuck

Some of the students I talked to also voiced concerns about how Ms. Fox's repetitive approach to teaching the notes and rhythms may frustrate students or lead them to feel undervalued. Arekusu described how she sometimes became frustrated when her teacher focused on a short passage in the music for long portions of class.

> [I get frustrated] when we keep messing up on one part and we have to stay on our part from the start of class to the end of class. We could have just skipped it and gone through other stuff. For me, with math problems, if I don't get it and I feel like I'm wasting time, I just skip it and do the stuff that's easier for me. Then as soon as I'm out of the easy stuff, I can go back to the problem. It's like refreshing my brain a little bit (Arekusu, interview, April 12, 2024).

Peeta believed that Ms. Fox could help students feel a greater sense of MI if she found more ways to empathize with their students, use positive reinforcement, and adapt her instruction to meet student needs. She commented:

A teacher should try to get into the minds of the choir instead of putting the choir into the mind of the teacher. We're just learning this piece; we don't know what's going on. Our teacher has probably sung this piece lots of times, or at least looked at it before. I feel like it's harder to learn from the teacher who's like, "Oh, come on, guys. Let's go. You're not doing this well. You're not doing this right," instead of the teacher who is like, "Okay, you're doing this part right, but what can we do to improve?" (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

Competing Learning Styles

Both from my observations and student interviews, I found that students may struggle with notation-based music learning because of their tendency to learn music by ear. Didi and I talked about this conflict of learning styles in our interview.

It's like we're playing the same record over and over and over again. Two or three weeks in a row, the same verses on solfège. It's what we're doing right now, right outside the door, over and over and over again. When the other parts are singing, I can hear my part in my head. I'm trying to look at the music because I'm supposed to look at my music, but I'm learning by hearing the next note in my head rather than seeing the note on the page (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

What Didi described above may be a result of how Ms. Fox supported note learning in choir. In my observations, I watched Ms. Fox primarily teach from the piano. Even though she asked students to sing their vocal parts using solfège syllables, Ms. Fox supported them by playing their parts on the piano. Didi's comment about hearing the note in her head instead of seeing the note on the page suggests that Ms. Fox's repeated playing of vocal parts at the piano may have

encouraged rote learning instead of notational literacy. Didi reflected further on how she learned her vocal part in choir, saying:

> My brain learned it by ear first, and now I'm using the symbols on the page to back myself up, rather than learning the symbols on the page and using what I hear to back up the symbols. It's like I'm doing the reverse of what we're learning to do in class (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

The conflict in learning styles that Didi described above suggests that embracing multiple learning modalities may be more helpful to students in developing MI.

Missing Emotional Connection

While observing rehearsals, I noticed that Ms. Fox frequently provided feedback to her choir, but most of what I observed tended to the technical aspects of their performance. She spent less instructional time asking for student input in expressive decisions, nor did I see her spend much time coaching the expressive elements (i.e., text interpretation, emotional aspects) of her choir's performance. When I asked Wanda about how she incorporated the interpretive and expressive qualities of the music they were learning into her teaching, she replied:

> [We use] question and answer, trial and error. It's me asking "Okay, are we content with this? Or do we want to make something different happen?" and then we work through that in a collaborative way. Ultimately, there does need to be give and take. Sometimes kids come up with their own ideas, and that's great. And we try them, and we validate those and then discuss, and unless it's something I really can't live with, we let that go" (WF final interview, April 18, 2024).

Wanda's reply above suggested that a student's sense of agency may play a role in how they develop expressive skills. She also indicated that she maintained a degree of control over interpretative decisions, which may impact how students develop expressive skills.

I also noticed that the students at Northern High School mentioned expressive skills in relation to MI less frequently than they did technical skills. No students included expressivity or emotional intent in their responses to my journal prompt asking them to define MI. When I asked students questions about MI in our semi-structured interviews, some answered by describing their abilities to do various musical tasks. In my interview with Angel, I specifically asked her if she thought of MI in terms of what someone could do musically or what they were able to feel musically. She explained:

> I think it's more of a thing you can do. I mean, it's something you can feel, sure. Like, you can feel proud of yourself. You can enjoy it. But I think it's more of a thing you can do. Independence is something you can reach (Angel, interview, April 8, 2024).

Although Angel described an emotional dimension of MI in this comment, she stated that MI was a state that people reached by acquiring skills. By acquiring those skills, one could achieve emotional benefits such as pride and musical enjoyment.

I asked Peeta if she thought Ms. Fox prioritized the expressive elements of choral music (i.e., interpretating emotional intent) in her teaching. Peeta responded:

> No. We talk about it at the very end. Once we've finished all of it, we talk about what the song's about. I feel like it's just grasping for straws; she hears how it's not complete in our sound. She's trying to fix it, so she says, "Oh, I know what's going on. Here, do this." We don't have the emotional connection" (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

Peeta suggested in her comment that teaching musical skills without proper attention to expressivity may lead students to become disengaged in learning, and less likely to develop skills and mindsets associated with MI. Didi and I also discussed the emotional and technical dimensions of MI in our interview. Her initial responses to my questions about MI highlighted technical skills, so I asked her about the role of expressivity in MI. In the following excerpt from our interview, Didi explained the importance of expressivity in MI.

>**Ben:** What's more important, that expressive part of music or the ability to read it and understand the symbols? In terms of developing your musical independence, which one of those is more important?
>
>**Didi:** 1,000% expressiveness. For me, it's always expression. You can listen to somebody sing a piece 100% accurately, but when you listen to somebody who has put their own artistry into it, extending a line or a louder crescendo or something, it makes it more interesting. And I think that it touches more people around you.
>
>**Ben:** Gotcha. How about you as a musician yourself? That's what I'm interested in.
>
>**Didi:** I don't struggle with the emotional parts of music, but music theory is challenging for me. So, I'm more focused on developing that right now (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

In the interview excerpt above, Didi suggested even though she felt expressivity was more important to MI, she prioritized growth in technical skills because it was a dimension of MI that she needed to improve.

What Are the Contextual Factors That May Inhibit or Facilitate MI?

I examined journal entries, teacher and student interviews, and my field notes to uncover potential contextual factors (structural influences) that may affect how students experience MI.

When I analyzed data from Northern High School, I encountered influences upon teacher decision-making with the potential to affect student MI. I also found larger structural influences exerted by the school that may impede access to music classes, which in turn may negatively impact student MI.

Public Performances and Teacher Instructional Decisions

Wanda mentioned in our interviews that the need to prepare for public performances may impact the way she rehearsed her choir. When I asked her if there were external factors that may impede her regular instructional objectives in choir, she replied:

> Well, a lot of it is what's on the calendar. Next year is a non-festival year, and I'm so excited that we don't have any major [performance] projects. So, it really can be the sky's the limit to explore our curricular goals for our students, and how we explore that is really up to us (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

In this comment, Wanda described how preparing for major performances like district choral festival may prevent her from pursuing curricular goals which may promote MI in her students.

Didi also discussed how district choral festival may have impacted her feelings of MI. Although she valued the learning activities leading up to festival, she felt a great deal of anxiety around the event.

> I was so nervous about how we were going to do and about sight reading. It wasn't necessarily about what we were doing. I liked being on stage and performing. But then we had somebody [the adjudicator] that we've never met before come up to us and say, "Oh, maybe we should do this." It felt like when we were being critiqued as a choir, it felt like I wasn't in control of who was telling me what I was doing wrong. I just didn't enjoy it (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

For Didi, the external audit of a judge impacted her sense of control and made her feel less musically independent. The reported loss of control added to the anxiety she felt over the festival results negatively affected Didi's enjoyment of the event, which may have further impeded her sense of MI.

Fitting Into the Sequence

Some of Wanda's rationale for prioritizing fundamental skills may have been related to the group of learners that she was teaching—a choir of beginning treble singers, all freshman in high school. Wanda's heavily skill-focused curriculum may have been intended to ready students for the auditioned choirs at Northern High School. In our interview, Wanda mentioned that she felt a responsibility to prepare students for what would come next.

> For example, when my singers go to Chorale [the advanced choir at Northern High School], they need to have a greater understanding of tempo markings, not just where to find them. Finding where those are, understanding polyphonic and homophonic textures. So, we just deepen that music theory aspect (WF, initial interview, February 26, 2024).

With this comment, Wanda described how expectations of what choir students should be able to do in advanced choirs may have shaped the educational experiences she provided for her beginning treble choir students. Considering comments from Peeta and Didi, however, it seems that Wanda's focus on skill-building for higher-level choirs may have caused some students to enjoy choir less and consider dropping the class.

Academic Pressures

A prevalent theme in the data from student interviews was the external pressure of academic and career planning those students faced. When I asked about how music might be a part of their lives after high school, all four interview participants immediately discussed their

future career plans and whether or not they would pursue jobs in music. Two of the participants, Didi and Angel, were interested in music-related careers, whereas Peeta and Arekusu planned to study law and medicine, respectively. Student views on continuing to study music aligned with their chosen career paths; Didi and Angel planned to remain in choir, while Peeta and Arekusu talked about leaving choir at the end of the school year. Peeta spoke with me about the academic pressures she felt to focus on coursework related to her potential career.

> The problem with high school is that everything is in preparation for your future. You can't choose something because you love it. You also have to think about what's going to happen if you choose it, and why you have to choose it (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

Arekusu discussed the financial challenges associated with pursuing a career in medicine and aimed to ease the burden on her family by obtaining college credits early. The early influence of career planning and financial conditions may have negatively impacted Arekusu's ability to pursue her musical interests and inhibited her sense of MI.

> Just going to college in general, it's expensive. And my family isn't top of the top, we're basically just average. So, I'm trying my best to make it easier for my parents, because I have two younger siblings. I just want to lift that weight from my family, so they have less stress from all this pricing stuff (Arekusu, interview, April 12, 2024).

By exerting external influence on students to prepare for college early in their high school career, academic pressures may serve as structural impediments to student MI.

Interpretation

Through their interviews, journal responses, and my observations, Ms. Fox and her students revealed their perspectives on MI. In the next section, I interpret my findings related to the three primary components of my conceptual model of MI—skills, learning dispositions, and

learner agency—and consider how they may contribute to or inhibit student MI. I also examine potential structural influences that may affect teachers and impact how students develop MI.

Developing Skills

At Northern High School, Ms. Fox and her students believed that notational literacy was a critical skill in developing MI. Student journal responses and interviews almost exclusively identified music theory and sight-singing as the skills necessary for becoming musically independent. The lack of student responses regarding other dimensions of MI suggests that Ms. Fox may have spent most of the choir's rehearsal time reinforcing notational literacy skills, which in turn may have shaped student perspectives on the nature of MI.

Wanda's priority of (and methods for) teaching music theory and building literacy skills may serve students who matriculate into upper-level ensembles, but there is evidence that it is leaving many students musically unfulfilled. Many students described how a lack of focus on expressive elements (i.e., emotional connection and overall aesthetic experience) diminished their sense of enjoyment, which may have factored into some students considering dropping out of choir. Although teaching skills such as basic piano competency, music literacy, and other technical abilities may give students more tools to develop MI, the lack of interest and engagement that some of Ms. Fox's students reported suggests that they joined choir to do more than just become better sight singers. Past researchers have suggested that the overall aesthetic experience was the primary motivator for continued adult participation in community choir (Redman & Bugos, 2019). Similarly, high school students who do not feel a sense of aesthetic fulfillment or emotional connection may lose their motivation to continue in choir. Once students have left the class, choir teachers lose their opportunity to help students develop MI through choral experiences.

In addition to contributing to disinterested music students, a singular focus on developing notational literacy promotes a limited view of MI that may not serve all students in choir. Didi, a student with extensive performance experience who intends to study music as a career, described that learning music through notation is still a challenge for her. "When I have to sit there and look at the page, and then sit up and hold it in front of me and try and sing it, I just get lost" (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024). Students who are less serious about their music study than Didi may find that a notational literacy-focused curriculum doesn't serve their musical interests, impeding their sense of MI. Additionally, teaching students that the only way to learn music is through notation ignores other ways of being musical, such as aural literacy, composition, and improvisation. Many musical traditions transmit ideas aurally, and dependence upon notation may limit a student's ability to access these traditions of music.

Nurturing Learning Dispositions

Ms. Fox mentioned musical curiosity as a key learning disposition in how students became musically independent. She believed that students who were interested in figuring out music on their own practiced skills and exhibited behaviors associated with MI. Students from Northern High School described rehearsal habits such as working ahead in their music and writing in solfège without being asked as components of MI. They also frequently mentioned confidence as an important trait of musically independent students.

The data from Northern High School provided new insight into positive learning dispositions that may be involved in developing MI. Although musical curiosity might be related to playfulness, it seems to capture a different inclination toward learning, that of joy in discovery. Students may find that their musical curiosity is enhanced by playful and fun musical encounters,

but curiosity infers a desire to know how things work, a distinctly different impulse than pursuing learning out of a sense of play.

The initiative for learning that Ms. Fox's students described may be closely related to reciprocity. Students seemed to be more likely to take ownership in their learning when they felt that they were contributing to a community of learners. Peeta described how singing in a choir depends both upon the contribution of individual members and their willingness to work as a team.

> You have to remember that you're not going to just be on stage by yourself singing by yourself. Every single person is an important part of it, so you can't outshine them. But you also can't hold yourself back, you all have to sing together (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

For Peeta, showing initiative involved meeting her responsibilities as a choir member without impeding her peers in the process. Finding this balance may be more indicative of musical interdependence than MI.

The most common learning disposition that Northern High School choir students discussed was confidence. Confidence seems to be most closely related to the disposition of resilience and may function as an enabling condition of resilience. As students develop confidence in their abilities, they may be more likely to persevere when they face musical challenges. Peeta described this ability as "having confidence to get past the rocky parts and get to the stuff that you're good at" (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024). In this way, confidence can help students develop the resilience to continue learning challenging musical skills that may support their sense of MI.

Enabling Agency

Ms. Fox believed she supported agency in choir by encouraging students to make expressive decisions in choir. Didi explained Ms. Fox's process in the following way:

> A lot of the time, we'll get a big whiteboard and we'll all write down how we feel about the pieces, all the emotions that go into them, and stuff like that. Everybody has their own part to play in deciding how we as a choir want to sing each piece (Didi, interview, April 9, 2024).

Not all of Ms. Fox's students believed they had agency to make musical decisions, however. Some felt that Ms. Fox was more interested in getting the music to sound the way she wanted it. Peeta explained:

> I feel like some of the fun has gotten out of choir, because it's not focused on feeling it, but [on] getting every note exactly how she wanted it instead of figuring out as a choir how to do it together (Peeta, interview, April 11, 2024).

In this quote, Peeta expressed a loss of agency because she perceived that Ms. Fox did not take a collaborative approach to learning in choir. It also suggests that learning dispositions such as playfulness may be intertwined with student feelings of agency. Peeta's statement infers that Ms. Fox's priority of note accuracy made Peeta feel that she didn't have a voice in the music-making process, leading her to enjoy choir less, and feel less musically independent.

Structural Constraints

Although Ms. Fox mentioned the influence of performance preparation on her instruction, I found that her students engaged in many activities that focused upon more than just getting ready for the next concert. Activities like the folk song project, Jams, and music literacy games are examples of how Wanda made time for instructional opportunities that she found

important to helping students develop MI. She also described participating in the state choral music festival as optional—an activity that she would not have her choir do next year so that they could focus on other learning opportunities. In this way, Ms. Fox demonstrated agential power to navigate the influence of institutional structures (i.e., state music festivals, school administration) that may pressure choir directors to favor festival preparation over other learning opportunities that may better contribute to developing student MI.

One of the prevalent structural influences appearing in Wanda's curriculum that could potentially inhibit student MI was the primacy of Western notational literacy in transmitting musical information. Ms. Fox stressed to me that notational literacy was fundamental in building MI and therefore was the most important skill that students learned in her class. For Wanda, the role of notational literacy was best understood as a social discourse (Scott, 2010) that conditioned the way she thought of music learning in choir. From her own lived experiences as a musician and music educator, Wanda learned that notated scores were the primary means of accessing musical information; therefore, she believed that teaching students to read on their own was the best way of promoting MI. In this way, notational literacy served as a structural constraint that limited Wanda's instructional decisions. Because Wanda's actions were influenced by a social discourse privileging music literacy above all other means of transmitting knowledge, her students did not receive instruction in other ways of learning music, such as by ear or through rote learning. This seemed to shape her students' perceptions and experiences of MI and may explain why so many students described MI as being dependent on knowledge of music theory and the ability to read music notation.

The most pressing and potentially intractable structural constraint that I encountered at Northern High School was the impact of academic pressure upon students' opportunities to study

music in high school. All of the interview participants, who were freshman in high school at the time of the study, reported that they felt they needed to focus on classes that would advance their career, even if that meant forgoing classes that they enjoyed. If students are to develop MI, they need to feel that they have the time to pursue their musical interests during the school day. Creating well-rounded students who are prepared for life after high school should consist of more than just training them for a lifetime of employment. This type of embodied structural impediment to MI (Scott, 2010) presents a significant challenge to choir teachers retaining students in their classes.

Chapter Summary

At Northern High School, Wanda Fox developed a choir curriculum that prioritized music literacy skills. Students learned these skills through a variety of musical experiences, including large ensemble rehearsals, small group work, and music theory worksheets. Although students recognize the value in these learning activities, many feel that the expressive qualities of music (i.e., emotional connection, personal interpretation) receive less attention than the technical aspects of music (i.e., notational music literacy, proficiency in solfège) in Ms. Fox's choir. Lacking an emotional outlet, some members of Ms. Fox's choir feel that they are missing an important component of MI.

Structural constraints such as public performances and academic pressures may also prevent students from accessing musical experiences that contribute to MI. Ms. Fox reported that many of her curricular decisions are influenced by the choir's performance schedule, leading her to spend more time preparing for concerts than she would prefer. The structural constraint of career readiness also presented a significant threat to student access to music classes at Northern High School and is a barrier that choir teachers may have limited agency to dismantle.

CHAPTER 7: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore what teachers and learners do in secondary choral settings to develop musical independence (MI). In this study, I also aimed to uncover potential structural influences which may hinder or support MI in choir. To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, I travelled to three high schools in a midwestern state to study how choir teachers and learners defined MI and how pedagogical practices may enable or constrain it. Participants described MI in ways that I expected to hear, including developing notational music literacy, encouraging initiative and resilience, and making independent musical decisions. They also shared new insights regarding MI such as the importance of expressivity, balancing of self and group, and interdependence.

In this chapter, I present a cross-case analysis of data from the three cases by utilizing a critical realist perspective. Critical realists practice retroduction, a process of looking back through the data to see how it aligns with theoretical propositions. Therefore, I conduct this cross-case analysis through my existing conceptual framework for MI. I begin by revisiting the conceptual model for MI I presented in chapter two. Next, I consider how data from this study aligned with the three main dimensions of MI (skills and competencies, dispositions, and agency) that I outlined in my conceptual model. I also present new findings, situating the emergent data within my larger framework of MI. Finally, I examine how the dimensions of MI interacted with each other in the cases and consider how these interactions may enable or constrain MI.

Contextual Considerations

Before presenting my findings, it is important to highlight the contextual differences and similarities between the three case sites in this study. According to Yin (2018), cross-case

analysis requires the researcher to discuss how the individual cases compare to each other to justify any presumed common findings between them. In this study, it is helpful to consider differences in institutional settings, classroom and student characteristics, and teacher experiences and backgrounds.

Institutional Settings

The three case sites in this study were all grade nine–twelve public high schools in the same midwestern state. Several salient differences existed between the demographics of each site. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2023), Southeastern High School had the highest percentage of White students (85%, $n = 1,358$), and lowest level of students receiving free or reduced priced lunch (11.96%, $n = 192$). Central High School was the most racially diverse of the sites,[7] and Northern High School had the highest number of students receiving free and reduced priced lunch (34%, $n = 519$). When considering the demographic profiles of each site, it is important to note that I did not collect demographic data on individual students in each choir, and that previous researchers have suggested that music ensembles are not always representative of school-wide demographics (Elpus, 2019). However, contextual components, particularly pertaining to levels of poverty in each case site, may have exerted external influences on the participants in this study, including their access to music courses (Elpus, 2022), educational resources, and school-wide curricular objectives. For example, there is some evidence from Northern High School that financial scarcity may have led Arekusu to prioritize career-oriented classes over music. Such external forces could have potentially

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[7] Central High School racial demographics: American Indian/Alaska Native (0.2%, $n = 3$), Asian (22.7%, $n = 333$), Black (6.9%, $n = 101$), Hispanic (5.2%, $n = 75$), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.0%, $n = 0$), White (57%, $n = 835$), two or more races (8.1%, $n = 119$).

impacted student musical opportunities and therefore affected their perceptions and experiences of MI.

Classroom and Student Characteristics

Each site varied in terms of student grade level and type of choral ensemble. At Southeastern High School, I observed an advanced mixed (SATB) ensemble consisting of students in grades eleven and twelve. The choir at Central High School was an intermediate treble ensemble made up of mostly tenth and eleventh-grade students. At Northern High School, I observed a beginning treble ensemble of all ninth-grade students. Both Southeastern and Central High School choirs required students to audition for membership; Northern High School's choir was open for any treble voice to participate. The varying levels of experience and student ability level between case sites may have affected how participants experienced and described MI. For example, the fact that Ms. Fox's choir at Northern High School was a beginning choir may have caused her to spend more instructional time teaching fundamental skills such as notational literacy and basic vocal technique. By emphasizing these skills, Ms. Fox may have influenced her students' perceptions of MI, leading many students to describe MI as a set of technical skills. Similarly, Ms. Parker may have allowed students in her advanced choir to make more interpretative choices in their music because they were more experienced and therefore more capable of making informed decisions.

Teacher Experiences and Backgrounds

All three participating teachers had more than ten years of public-school experience, and all three had master's degrees; Ms. Parker and Ms. Fox held master's degrees in choral conducting, and Ms. Newcomer in music education. Ms. Fox had extensive training in piano and also completed an internship with the Chicago Lyric opera where she had access to highly

specialized vocal training. Ms. Newcomer began her music education as a band student and transitioned into choir during her high school years. Ms. Parker was an accomplished multi-genre solo performer and maintained an active performance schedule as a soloist singing jazz and R&B, as well as being a professional Western classical choral performer. The distinct musical experiences of the participating teachers in this study may have influenced their perceptions of MI, thereby affecting their instructional decisions and priorities for their students.

Components of Musical Independence

As I argued in chapter two, MI is a multidimensional and highly contextualized construct which requires a nuanced description. Therefore, I defined musically independent high school choir students in the following way: (1) they possess skills to independently decode, perform, communicate, and create within the system of symbolic or aural transmission specific to a particular genre or repertoire, (2) they maintain positive dispositions toward learning (i.e., resilience, reciprocity, and playfulness), and (3) they exercise agency in *what* they choose to learn about choral music and *how* they go about learning it. In the next section, I synthesize my findings from the three individual cases by situating them within my conceptual framework from Chapter Two. To help the reader follow the presentation of my findings, I have included my visual model for MI in choirs in Figure 7.1 below.

Figure 4

Visual Model for Musical Independence in High School Choirs
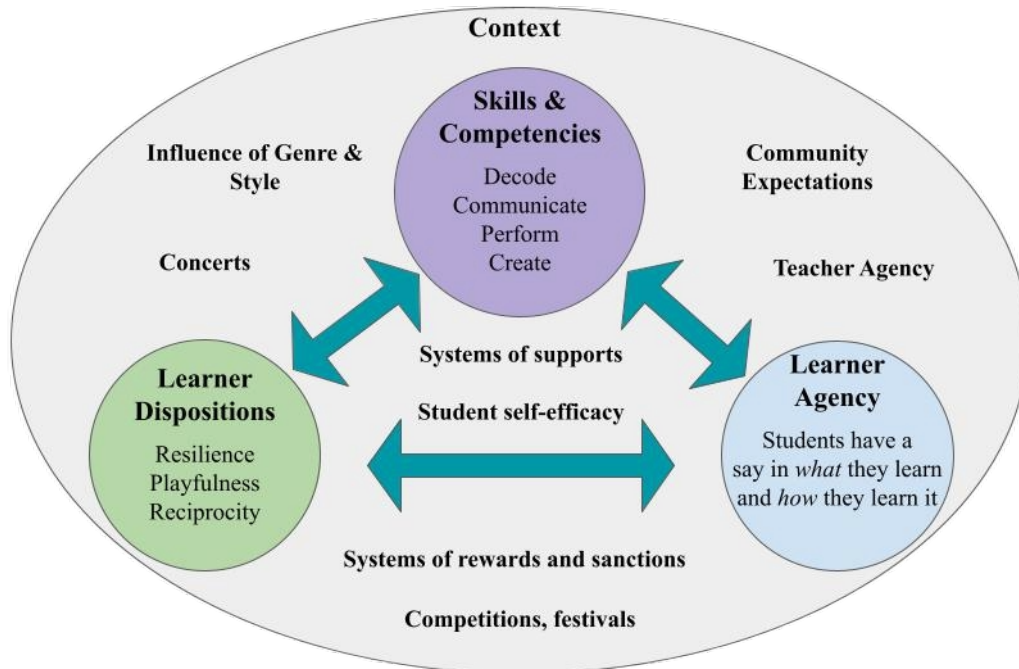
Skills and Competencies

At all three sites, teachers and students described specific skills and competencies such as notational literacy and part independence as vital components of MI. Although their perceptions often aligned with one another, there were noticeable differences between how teachers and students in the three settings conceptualized MI. Teachers in this study were more likely to define MI as a set of measurable abilities—musical skills that students could *do* without a teacher's help. Alternatively, students often described MI as something that they could *feel*, a sensation that students experienced through opportunities for individual expression. They also reported that their sense of MI was supported by feeling competent and confident in their levels of musical skill. Next, I consider the data related to skills needed for MI and situate these findings within the four subcomponents of skill outlined in my framework: decoding, communicating, performing, and creating.

Decoding

Students and teachers from all three sites recognized the value of notational literacy in developing MI in choir. To help students build literacy skills, Ms. Fox (Northern High School), Ms. Newcomer (Central High School), and Ms. Parker (Southeastern High School) all utilized solfège (moveable *do, la*-based minor) to help students decode pitches. For learning rhythms, teachers used a variety of systems, including the Eastman number-based method (Ms. Fox and Ms. Parker), Gordon rhythmic syllables (Ms. Parker), and Kodály rhythmic syllables (Ms. Newcomer). Data from my observations and student interviews suggested that these decoding systems were valuable to learning when students first encounter new music, but that their usefulness quickly faded once they began to rehearse their music. At Northern High School, Didi commented that notational literacy was counter-intuitive to her learning style, explaining that once she heard her part played or sung, she learned it better by ear. Considering these comments from Didi and others in the choir, Ms. Fox's approach of continuing to use solfège for weeks of rehearsal may not have encouraged the type of notational literacy that she hoped it would. What is clear from student interviews at Northern High School is that Ms. Fox's persistent use of solfège prevented students from making expressive connections to the music, reducing their interest and motivation.

At Central High School, students were proficient in using solfège to decode the sight-singing exercises that they practiced in preparation for district choral festival. They demonstrated their reading skills through a student-centered process with little to no help from Ms. Newcomer. Notably, I did not observe that these skills transferred into how students learned their choir repertoire for performance. When I asked Princess #12 (Central High School choir student) about how she might learn music without her teacher playing notes at the piano or using a pre-recorded

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rehearsal track, she was momentarily at a loss for how to respond, remarking that she had never really considered how she might do that. These findings suggest that teaching sight-singing solely through exercises without making explicit connections to the literature may delay students in transferring decoding skills into authentic music-making.

In all three sites, the use of the piano during the decoding process may have interfered with the cognitive processes necessary for students to learn vocal music through notation. Hearing the piano play a vocal line may encourage singers to learn their parts through imitation rather than through independent musical thought, something Gordon (1999) referred to as audiation. Indeed, if MI in choir includes the ability to independently decode and recreate musical excerpts from notated scores, the way the teachers in this study used the piano may serve as a structural impediment to MI (Scott, 2010). By enacting common pedagogical practices (i.e., teaching using an imitative process with the piano) that they likely learned through their own music education experiences and teacher-training programs, teachers may replicate the norms of institutional structures and perpetuate a teaching methodology that delays student learning in sight-singing. Considering the ways I observed teachers in this study use the piano in rehearsal, it is possible that they may have been more interested in teaching individual vocal parts quickly so that the choir could begin to work on ensemble goals such as artistic interpretation and choral tone. Consequently, the use of the piano may have limited the development of MI for students in this study. If the ability to independently learn music without the assistance of the piano is an important component of MI, teachers should consider minimizing the role of the piano in how their students learn music for performance.

Communicating

Communicating ideas through music was an important component of MI to student participants in all three sites. Although nearly all students mentioned expressivity as a component of MI, it was a particularly prevalent theme at Southeastern High School. At Southeastern, student perceptions of MI strongly aligned with their teacher's self-identified pedagogical goal of teaching expressivity as part of MI. She told me how she encouraged students to filter authentic aspects of themselves through performance, and how she created learning activities (i.e., the solo performance project and Cabaret) for her students to practice making expressive decisions. I observed how her teacher-as-producer approach invited students to think critically about the meanings imbued in the music without explicitly making those decisions for them. For Ms. Parker and her students, expressivity was not simply executing dynamic markings on the score, it was interpreting text and seeking personal meaning from the combination of lyrics and music in each piece. When they were authentically communicating their personal ideas through music, Southeastern students felt most musically independent.

At Central High School, Ms. Newcomer's students also identified expressivity as a salient feature of MI. Like the students at Southeastern, Central High School students defined expressivity as conveying emotion through singing, but they tended to describe it as something that the group experienced together. This may be because there were fewer opportunities for students to perform independently in Ms. Newcomer's choir. Even though there was a strong group element to how Central students described expressivity, Princess #12 emphasized that Ms. Newcomer allowed students to seek their own interpretations of the music, adding to the authenticity and effectiveness of the group's performance.

Expressivity was not initially a prevalent theme at Northern High School. Very few students mentioned it in their journal entries concerning MI, and the first thing most interview participants talked about were technical skills such as notational literacy and music theory. However, as I investigated further, students began to talk about the absence of expressivity and emotional involvement in their rehearsals and how that absence detracted from their sense of MI. With a focus on note accuracy and technical precision, it seems that Northern High School students lacked the opportunity to authentically communicate aspects of their identities, leading them to feel less musically independent.

It is interesting to consider the degree of interrelatedness between the ability to communicate expressive intent and the opportunity for students to exercise agency. By intentionally creating space for students to make their own musical decisions, Ms. Parker and Ms. Newcomer encouraged students to become more effective musical communicators. In rehearsal, this often meant less time spent chasing down correct notes and rhythms and more time talking about extra-musical meanings. Teachers may find that they are better able to foster MI in their students if they recognize MI as an expression of student identity, not just a set of skills.

Performing

In this study, participants from all three sites believed performance to be a fundamental part of MI. Indeed, public performance is an expectation in most school choir programs, although the frequency and types of performances may vary across contexts. It is important to note that performing in a choir is not an inherently independent activity; singing in a choir cannot be done by oneself. However, the ability to independently perform music and maintain part independence are skills that teachers and students in this study believed to be vital components

of MI. Accordingly, most of the classroom activities I observed were in preparation for some type of performance. During the time I observed, Ms. Fox and Ms. Parker led rehearsals in which the choir prepared music for public performances, but they also created and programmed activities in which students worked in small groups or by themselves to perform in class. In the timeframe of this study, I only had the opportunity to see Ms. Newcomer lead full choir rehearsals, although she confirmed in interviews that there were times in the school year in which students made music in small groups. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the different ways I saw students perform and consider how it may have contributed or detracted from MI.

      District Choir Festival. All three of the choirs I observed participated in adjudicated choir festivals administered by the same state vocal music organization. As such, I had the opportunity to observe three different choirs preparing for the same event. There were notable similarities in the rehearsal approaches of each choir leading up to the festival. In all cases, each participating teacher's instructional style was highly teacher-centric during festival preparation. Teachers spent most of these rehearsals engaged in error detection and trouble-shooting passages that they thought judges might comment upon. Ms. Fox and Ms. Parker even actively sought my advice as they readied their choirs for their festival performances. Occasionally, the teachers would solicit students' opinions on interpretive decisions, but festival preparation seemed to be less of a collaborative process than some of the other performance activities I observed. It is possible that the external pressure of adjudication influenced teacher decision-making during festival rehearsals, serving as an institutional or systemic structure (Scott, 2010) that may have impeded student MI. Because teachers felt professional pressure to receive high marks at adjudicated festivals, their own sense of agency in instructional decision-making may have been

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negatively affected. In fact, Ms. Fox mentioned in our interview that she was looking forward to not taking the choir to festival next year, allowing her more freedom in her curricular choices. By not going to festival, Ms. Fox believed that she could focus on learning activities that may better contribute to student experiences of MI.

However, it is also possible that the increased focus on technical aspects of performance during festival helped students build skills that are associated with MI. In my observations at Central High School, I noticed that Ms. Newcomer held students to a higher standard of performance during festival preparations, and that students seemed more engaged in festival rehearsals. Several students commented about this in their journal entries, some stating that they felt their sense of MI was better supported during festival preparations than at other times in the school year. It was also clear that many students felt a great deal of pride in their choir's festival performance. This sense of pride may contribute to feelings of competence and confidence, other components that students mentioned were related to their sense of MI.

Solo and Small Group Projects. Besides the large group performance experience, students at Southeastern High School also performed by themselves as the culmination of the solo project. Ms. Parker allowed them to select their solo to prepare for a class performance, but she also spent instructional time teaching the entire choir five songs from which they could choose for their performance. This project concluded with each student presenting not only their performance, but a character sketch in which they created a narrative based upon their interpretation of the song's text.

At Northern High School, Ms. Fox's students spent instructional time learning music to perform folk songs in small groups during class. In this activity, I observed students utilizing solfège and the piano to assist them with note decoding, skills that they had learned from Ms.

Fox in choir. I also saw them using online resources such as YouTube videos to practice their songs with prerecorded accompaniment tracks. Similar to the folk song project at Northern High School, students from Southeastern High School engaged in small group learning during the Cabaret project. Ms. Parker outlined expectations and desired outcomes in a written assignment description, but students were completely in charge of choosing their own music and implementing all of the steps involved in learning and performing it. If they decided that they wanted to learn their music with the help of written notation, they were responsible for procuring the score. If they chose to learn it by ear, they found recordings and decided who was going to cover each part. In these projects, Ms. Fox and Ms. Parker gave students autonomy to guide their own learning and apply skills such as note decoding and part independence, skills that participants described as being involved in MI.

Considering the role of performance in fostering MI, the opportunity to perform in small groups or by oneself may provide students with more authentic and transferrable skills that they can use in music making outside of ensemble settings. The way that Ms. Parker encouraged students to use resources to create, rehearse, and perform music of their own choosing seems to offer the greatest potential for students to learn to apply music skills to make their own music outside of the choir classroom. However, without first having built those skills through teacher-led instruction, students engaged in self-directed music learning may become frustrated and give up. Choir teachers who are interested in supporting MI in their students should consider offering a wide variety of performance tasks as a part of a holistic curriculum. Creating opportunities for students to perform in large groups, small groups, and by themselves can offer a scaffolded approach to developing MI in choral music. In this way, students can learn necessary music skills

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through teacher guidance in large ensemble music-making, and then apply those skills independently in their own musical explorations.

Creating

Of the four subcomponents outlined in my conceptual model of MI, I found the least evidence pertaining to creating. Of the three sites, Central High School students had the fewest opportunities to be creative. At no time during my observations did I see Central students engaged in learning activities other than sight-singing drills or choral rehearsal. At Northern High School, students had the opportunity to make some creative decisions regarding interpretation in their folk song project, but they were limited to performing already composed music. The most compelling data that I collected related to musical creativity came from Southeastern High School's Cabaret project. Although the Cabaret project allowed students to exercise musical creativity, it did not require it; students had the option of recreating performances from already notated scores. However, the project provided a scaffolded approach to creativity, letting students decide how they wanted to arrange their song, how they wanted to stage it, and how they wanted to interpret it. In a performance-oriented class such as choir, the Cabaret project represented an authentic display of learned skills and a realistic application of those skills to make a musical creation.

The lack of music composition activities I observed in this study may stem from teacher inexperience in teaching songwriting, but it may also have to do with a philosophical inclination of choir teachers to prioritize performance over other musical skills. Choir teachers who prioritize creativity as part of MI may find that projects such as the Cabaret unit at Southeastern High School are accessible entry points to teaching students to create their own music. Like any skill, the more students have a chance to practice it, the more likely they are to become proficient

at it. Finding more opportunities to encourage musical creativity and composition in choir may be an important tool in building MI in choir students.

Learning Dispositions

Participants in this study often mentioned behaviors that they believed to be characteristics of musically independent choir students. Many of these behaviors were closely related to the three core learner dispositions (i.e., resilience, playfulness, and reciprocity) I theorized in my conceptual model of MI. Teachers and students in this study also described learner dispositions that I did not expect, such as interdependence, initiative, and curiosity. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss findings related to learner dispositions and consider how they may support MI in choir.

Resilience

In their interviews, many students mentioned behaviors that I coded as resilience. Bats and Xavier (Southeastern High School students) both described how the social support from their peers and teachers bolstered their resilience, encouraging them to persevere through challenges in choir. Peeta (Northern High School student) described how being musically independent meant "getting through the tough parts" (Peeta interview, April 11, 2024) to be able to experience more rewarding musical moments. Other students referred to MI as a mindset (e.g., Angel, Peeta, Beetle) which supported them in overcoming obstacles when learning music. The ways that students described mindset seemed incongruent with the theories of Dweck (1999) that characterized mindset as fixed or growth oriented. Students focused instead on persistence; a character trait more closely aligned with grit.

Participant responses suggested that resilience in choir was best supported through positive peer and teacher relationships. In all three sites, students spoke of how they felt safe to

make mistakes and experiment with their voices. Several participants mentioned in their interviews that this sense of trust is especially important in choir, a performing art in which individuals make music with their voices. Peeta spoke about how choir helped her develop the confidence to use her singing voice in public, Xavier talked about his peers empathizing with him when his voice cracked in rehearsal, and Ms. Newcomer described singing as a distinctly personal act in which people shared a part of themselves. Indeed, Ms. Newcomer stated that this intimate quality of vocal music was one of the reasons she focused on building positive relationships in her choirs. In this study, social support seemed to serve as a protective shield that bolstered students' feelings of resilience. This finding reinforces the role of social support in fostering MI, a key tenet of my conceptual model.

Conversely, a learner's sense of resilience may be negatively affected by an absence of social support. Although I did not observe unsupportive social environments in this study, I did see some variation between sites in students' level of comfort in asking for help. At Central and Southeastern High Schools, students frequently asked questions during rehearsal. They also reported in interviews and journal entries that they felt comfortable asking their teacher for help any time that they needed it. At Northern High School, students were less engaged in rehearsal. They were very responsive to teacher feedback, but they tended to wait to be corrected rather than ask for help. When I asked about this, some students mentioned that they felt uncomfortable asking Ms. Fox for help because she sometimes seemed impatient with their questions. Some of the reticence that these students reported in asking questions may be related to their experience; the treble choir at Northern High School was the youngest group in the study. Additionally, the treble choir at Northern High School was the only choir in which every participant was in their first year with their choir teacher. Most students at Central and Southeastern High Schools had

been in choir for more than one year with their respective teachers, a factor that may have contributed to their comfort in asking questions during rehearsal. From my observations of student engagement in all three sites, it appears that maintaining a positive and supportive relationship between students and teachers may be a key factor in developing resilient music learners.

Playfulness

Teachers in this study incorporated play into their instruction to teach music theory skills, encourage creativity, and provide a fun break for students. In the cases of Ms. Fox and Ms. Newcomer, they mentioned dedicating class time for playing games with their students. Ms. Fox used games to make learning difficult concepts like key signatures more engaging, and Ms. Newcomer promoted relationship-building through the use of games. Instead of playing games, Ms. Parker fostered playfulness in her students by encouraging musical playfulness in the cabaret project. This sense of playfulness increased their interest, motivating them to learn at their own pace and supporting their sense of MI through playful experimentation.

It is interesting to note that in all of the student data from the three sites, I only coded playfulness once, occurring in the following interview excerpt from Peeta:

> We did this thing for [one of the songs we were learning for festival] where we just kind of ran around the piano and sang to each other. We didn't think about how we were doing on the piece, but we thought of it more as this fun thing, and we could take it less seriously. Afterwards, everyone was like, "Oh, now I really like that. That was really fun," and I think we sounded a lot better on that song after that (Peeta interview, April 11, 2024).

In this response, Peeta explained how playfulness motivated students in the choir by alleviating some of the pressure they felt preparing for the upcoming festival. According to Peeta, restoring a sense of play to rehearsal may have even improved their performance. What is interesting about this data coming from Northern is that it possibly emerged because Ms. Fox's students perceived a lack of playfulness in choir. Data from other student interviews at Northern High School suggested that students often "zoned out" (Didi interview, April 9, 2024) during rehearsals because they were overly focused on notational literacy. At Central and Southeastern High Schools, I observed students to be more playfully engaged in daily activities than at Northern. Students often joked with their teachers and classmates during choir, creating a climate that sometimes seemed to me to be unfocused, but one that the students seemed to greatly enjoy. Silena (Central High School student) even commented that she intended to stay in choir for all of her high school years because choir gave her something to look forward to in her rigorous school day. It may be that choir is a class in which students expect their teacher to encourage their sense of play. If students do not feel that their teachers encourage playfulness, they may become disinterested in engaging with the content, disrupting their opportunity to develop skills associated with MI.

Reciprocity

In analyzing data across the cases, I observed reciprocity occurring in two different ways—reciprocity between teacher and students, and reciprocity between students. The data I collected regarding student reciprocity led to an emergent theme of interdependence. In the next section, I discuss both forms of reciprocity and how it could potentially contribute to MI.

Teachers Learning from Students. I found reciprocity occurring between teachers and students when teachers actively sought opinions and ideas from their students. Ms. Parker

reported that she sometimes changed how the choir interpreted a piece based upon feedback from her students. Ms. Newcomer mentioned that students helped her find new repertoire to learn for the spring concert. In both of these cases, teachers reported gaining new insights about choral music from their students. This type of teacher/student reciprocity both enables and fosters student agency. When teachers allowed students to make choices, students had an opportunity to share what they learned with their teachers. As they see their teachers continuing to learn, students may find themselves energized to seek new opportunities to pursue learning music on their own. Princess #12 (Central High School student) mentioned this in her interview, describing how choosing repertoire for Ms. Newcomer's choir led her to spend hours in her room at home listening to new choir music. This kind of self-initiated learning is an example of how students who are given the opportunity to make decisions about what they learn may continue to explore new music on their own outside of class time.

       Interdependence. Early on in the study, I began to wonder how student MI may be related to interdependence. The idea of interdependence emerged after a conversation I had with Dr. Brandon Waddles[8], a collegiate choral music educator who was working with the Southeastern High School advanced choir during the time I was observing. As I was describing the dimensions of MI that I was investigating, Dr. Waddles mentioned the idea of interdependence, defining it as a state of both individual responsibility to the choir and an individual's reliance on the efforts of the group as a whole. As we talked, we discussed how the abilities of individual members contributed to the group's musical potential, and how the group could empower the individual. I started to view MI as being both part of and separate from interdependence, and considered how they may interact in sites of this study.

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[8] Dr. Waddles consented to have his real name used in this study.

Students in all three sites frequently mentioned how they worked with their classmates to learn their choir music. This happened directly when students worked in sectionals, but it also happened indirectly, such as how Didi (Northern High School student) described learning her parts by ear as she listened to her classmates singing around her. Students also acknowledged the importance of contributing their voices and musicality in order for the choir to be successful. Beatrice (Central High School student) talked about putting the choir first, and how not giving one's best effort might let them down. Bats (Southeastern High School) reflected that choir contributed to an individual's independence by supporting their skill building and resilience. The amount of data I collected related to interdependence was extensive, suggesting that it is a key component of student learning in choir. Because of how students described the ways they felt supported by their peers and how interdependence contributed to their feelings of MI, interdependence may be best described as a contextual element that supports how students develop MI.

Initiative

Another emergent theme related to learner dispositions was initiative. Students from Central and Northern High Schools often mentioned initiative as an essential component of MI. They described behaviors such as practicing music on their own at home, writing solfège syllables in their scores, and working ahead in their music so that they could help their classmates learn music faster.

In this study, initiative appears to be enabled by skills and empowered by agency. Students at Central High School described how Ms. Newcomer not only taught them fundamental sight-singing skills, but modeled for them a process of how to learn music on their own. Beetle (Central High School student) explained that by modeling both the skills and the

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behaviors involved in becoming better sight-readers, Ms. Newcomer encouraged her students to take the initiative to learn music on their own. Similarly, at Northern High School, Arekusu believed that doing the work without being told was a key component of MI. She spoke about how Ms. Fox taught students a process of how to mark up their choir music, but that it was up to her to work ahead and make the markings. Furthermore, students at Northern High School learned basic piano skills, a powerful learning tool that they could use to practice their music without Ms. Fox's help.

To demonstrate initiative, students must also have the agency to decide whether or not to act. If a student is only acting because the director has required it or there is an extrinsic reward or sanction dictating their action, their behavior is not an example of initiative; it is an act of compliance. In all sites, students had the agency to be as involved in their music learning as they chose to be. One example of this element of choice occurred at Central High School during the sight-singing exercises. When I observed students working in small groups, I saw a range of engagement among the members of the choir. Most student groups were guided by the actions of a leader who took the initiative to decode the notation. Other students within the group seemed more content to listen and follow along. From what I observed, it seemed that some students were actively thinking about the melodic content (audiating) while others were passively echoing back what they heard (imitating). Although I could not determine which students were audiating or imitating from my field observation, my experience as a public-school choir teacher led me to believe that not all students were actively decoding notes and rhythms during the sight-singing exercises I observed. In this way, initiative and skill are closely interrelated. A choir student needs to possess certain skills to be able to exercise initiative in learning music, but in turn must actively exercise initiative to practice the skill and gain proficiency. In a choir, this is a

particularly challenging set of skills and behaviors for a teacher to assess as it is possible for a student to successfully echo sing music they have never heard before by imitating the notes sung by a person nearby. Students who have the initiative to independently practice skills outside of class may be more likely to become proficient in skills related to MI.

Curiosity

The last emergent theme related to learning dispositions I encountered in this study was curiosity. Participants described musically independent students as possessing a desire to understand how music works and an interest in how they could extend their learning beyond the choral classroom. When she mentioned musical curiosity, Ms. Fox talked about students being interested in new styles and genres of music, but also being inquisitive about how music fits into their daily lives. She also described curiosity as leading students to develop an informed opinion about their musical tastes, empowering them to pursue musical opportunities that they find fulfilling.

I also found that students strongly associated curiosity with MI. Arekusu (Northern High School student) told me how she expressed MI by taking what she learned from choir to create her own songs at the piano at home. In our interview, Bats (Southeastern High School student) described his musical curiosity in the following way:

> I'm fascinated by music. I want to learn everything I can about it, I want to get as good at music as I humanly can. I want to play every instrument; I want to sing every note. I want to experience music as many times as I can, in as many different ways as I can (Bats, initial interview, March 18, 2024).

When I asked Bats how he developed his sense of musical curiosity, he credited Ms. Parker's teaching style. Both he and Xavier believed their teacher helped to nurture their musical curiosity

by introducing them to many sources of musical knowledge, but allowing them to form their own opinions about it.

Musical curiosity, however, may vary from student to student and be affected by their own cultural experiences. Although Bats and Xavier, both White male students, felt their teacher chose choir music from diverse cultural backgrounds, Kermie, a non-binary Arab American student, believed that Ms. Parker chose a disproportionate amount of music from the Western canon. Kermie appreciated Ms. Parker's efforts at diversifying their musical opportunities, but they longed for her to do more. In our conversation, Kermie discussed times in choir that their musical curiosity was left unfulfilled. They mentioned to me that they wished their teacher would program an Arabic choral piece in the future, but that Ms. Parker may be affected by community expectations as to what the choir should sing. When I asked Kermie about how they would feel if Ms. Parker chose an Arabic piece for the choir to perform, they replied:

> I think if you sing, people will listen. And I think if we didn't tell the parents that we were going to sing a song that might make them a little uncomfortable, we would finish it, and they would hear it as music and any reservations that they would have would float away, because I think that's what music can do (Kermie, initial interview, March 19, 2024).

In this comment, Kermie explained that although audiences may have certain expectations for what choirs should sing, choir teachers should be undeterred in programming music that might make audiences uncomfortable. Kermie believed that audiences would hear the performance as music, and perhaps learn to appreciate new musical styles. This is particularly important in Kermie's case because their musical culture is not represented by the dominant musical culture in the Southeastern school community. For Kermie, MI was intimately linked with expressing

culture. Choir teachers who hope to foster MI in their students must carefully attend to the needs of underrepresented students to see themselves in the music they sing while also nurturing their musical curiosity through plentiful opportunities to learn about new musical styles.

Learner Agency

From my analysis of the data across the three cases, agency was strongly interrelated with skills and dispositions. The opportunity for students to make interpretive decisions about the music and choices about what types of music they learned helped to nurture their musical curiosity. In interviews, students disclosed that their sense of agency was strongly associated with their enjoyment of choir and their expressions of identity. I also received journal responses from students that indicated they believed they benefited from ceding some of their agential power to their teachers so that they could learn about music they may not have heard before. In this section, I discuss the ways students described the relationship between agency and MI and consider what teachers did to encourage or dissuade their students' sense of agency.

Personal Fulfillment

For some students, it seemed that their sense of MI was closely related to the qualities they most valued for themselves. Having the agency to pursue their musical goals promoted self-actualization and contributed to their feelings of MI. Angel, (Northern High School student) who wanted to improve her music theory skills so that she could become a classically trained musician, felt her MI improved as she developed technical skills. She felt most musically independent when she was able to demonstrate those skills, such as when she played the accompaniment for a group of younger children in a performance at her church. Peeta (Northern High School student), who studied voice privately and valued singing as an emotional outlet, felt MI when the choir focused on applying expressive elements that enhanced the meaning of the

song's lyrics. Beetle (Central High School student) and Arekusu (Northern High School student) spoke of MI as a studious behavior, describing it as the drive to study music on their own. They felt that a teacher could only provide limited assistance in experiencing MI; it was up to the student to put in the work to become musically independent.

Through their instructional choices, teachers in this study used different activities to support students in finding personal fulfillment in choir. From student responses and my observations, it seemed that small group activities such as Ms. Fox's folk song project and Ms. Parker's cabaret unit provided the best opportunities for students to align their music learning with their personal goals. Both the folk song project and the cabaret unit allowed students to choose their repertoire and apply skills in ways that they found musically rewarding and personally fulfilling.

It is important to note that these independent learning projects may be very challenging or impossible for students to complete without prior direct instruction from their choir teachers or other experienced musicians. Although some students have outside training from parents or private instructors, leading them to be more able to guide their own learning without the assistance of their choir teacher, many others learn everything they know about music in choir class. For this reason, supporting students in developing skills such as basic piano proficiency and error detection may be important prerequisites to self-directed projects like the folk song or cabaret units. By teaching students how to identify areas for improvement and helping them build the skills to fix them on their own, teachers may better foster MI in their choirs.

Not all students need the same level of support in building the requisite skills for MI. Teachers can best meet the needs of their students by finding ways to differentiate instruction, providing more help for those students who need it and more choice to all of their students. A

useful approach to providing differentiation of instruction and allowing student choice is the skills grid that Ms. Parker used at Southeastern High School. Although students were ultimately responsible for attaining proficiency in all of the skills on the grid, they could choose which order they wished to complete them in, and they could choose whether they wanted to submit recordings or perform them live for Ms. Parker to assess. By offering students these elements of choice in demonstrating core musical skills, Ms. Parker created a curriculum that helped develop necessary skills in a way that supported student agency.

Finding Balance

Students in this study had varied opinions about how much agency they should have in making repertoire decisions. Peeta felt strongly that being able to choose her own music to study contributed to her sense of MI. She reported that she felt more musically independent in her private voice study than she did in choir. Arekusu stated that although she felt singing music of her choosing may increase her interest, she also enjoyed and benefitted from learning new music that her teacher chose for the choir. Other participants noted that their teacher possessed knowledge and training that made them more qualified to choose appropriate music for them to sing. It is interesting to note that two of the students (Beetle & Bats) who believed student choice of repertoire to be unimportant to MI planned to study music education in college. Beetle said that she didn't have to like a song to be musically independent; MI was the result of the work she put in to become proficient. Bats said that there needed to be a balance of student choice and teacher guidance in repertoire. While it was important for him to authentically express himself through music, Bats also trusted his teacher to choose music for him because he believed she knew what music was important for him to learn.

These findings suggest that choir teachers may best support MI in choir by striking a balance between providing opportunities for student choice and offering their trained expertise in repertoire selection and musical interpretation. Students choose to take choir for different reasons, and have varied needs in how they develop their sense of MI. For students like Peeta, whose sense of MI was enhanced by personal expression, allowing more opportunities to make musical choices about repertoire and musical interpretation may be more important to their sense of MI. In the case of students like Angel, Bats, and Beetle, who all hope to continue their music study after high school, providing expert guidance may better support MI.

My analysis of the three sites in this study suggests that teachers in this study were not always successful in finding an appropriate balance between their own instructional goals and the musical goals that students had for themselves. When teacher instructional styles tended to allow for less student input, students reported feeling lower levels of MI. At Central High School, some students commented that they felt they lacked the skills to be musically independent, even though Ms. Newcomer utilized a highly student-centered approach to sight-singing. This may be because students primarily learned their choir music from Ms. Newcomer playing their parts for them on the piano or by using pre-recorded practice tracks. Central High School students may have benefitted from their teacher making more explicit connections between the skills that they learned in sight-singing exercises to the authentic music-making activities they engaged in during choir rehearsal. At Northern High School, students reported that they lacked the emotional and expressive connection to music necessary to experience MI. In this case, Ms. Fox's instructional goal of promoting part independence and notational literacy through solfège may not have aligned with her students' musical goals of self-expression and communicating emotional intent, leading them to report a negative effect to their sense of MI.

Considering how students describe MI, of course, is only part of understanding the phenomenon of MI. It is possible that students are conflating their level of enjoyment with MI in their responses, leading the findings to discount activities that may support dimensions of MI but be less enjoyable for students. Ignoring their perceptions, however, deprives students of agency and marginalizes their musical experiences. Students who feel that their musical needs are not being met are far more likely to drop out of choir and elect to take a class that provides better opportunities for self-actualization. For this reason, student agency may be the most critical component of MI and one that choir teachers must carefully attend to.

Summary of Cross-Case Analysis

Students and teachers in this study viewed MI in ways that were both similar and divergent. At times, there seemed to be alignment between student and teacher views of MI. For example, students at Southeastern High School strongly associated skills such as expressing emotional intent through music with MI, a skill that Ms. Parker reported to be her primary instructional goal. At Central High School, students often spoke about the importance of social connections to their feelings of MI in choir, a finding that also aligned with Ms. Newcomer's stated goal for the choir. These findings suggest that a choir teacher's stated instructional priorities may have a profound impact on how students view MI and other aspects of music learning.

As I began to collect data at Northern High School, I found that many students echoed Ms. Fox's views on MI, citing skills such as music theory and solfège as being most important. After semi-structured interviews with students, however, it became clear that there were students who felt that there were other components of MI that Ms. Fox's instruction did not address,

namely the importance of expressing emotional intent through music performance. This suggests that students have their own opinions and musical needs that comprise their sense of MI.

Looking across all three sites, students believed that expressing individuality and emotional intent in choir was the most important component of MI. This is a particularly salient finding, given that choir performances seem to typically coalesce around a unified emotional interpretation. When I asked students about this potential paradox, they explained that although the choir did agree on a general expressive framework for each piece, they maintained their own individual interpretation of the music. Through filtering their personal feelings into their performances, students felt that they were able to best contribute to the choir.

Emergent findings in this cross-case analysis included new learning dispositions such as initiative and curiosity. These dispositions describe how students exhibit behaviors that lead them to pursue opportunities to learn and practice music on their own. Initiative best describes how students go about independently working on music that they are learning in choir class, whereas curiosity outlines how students take what they learn in choir to seek out new musical experiences.

Another important emergent finding from this study is the phenomenon of interdependence in choirs. Many participants explained how the actions of one choir member can impact the efforts of the group, and conversely, how the efforts of the group might affect the individual member. From a critical realist perspective, interdependence in choir is akin to the reciprocal relationship of structure and agency (Bhaskar, 1979/2015). Structures are comprised of the individual actions of agents, and at the same time, the actions of agents are influenced by the expectations and limitations imposed by structures. In this study, students reported that singing in choir sometimes required them to give up elements of their MI, such as adapting their

voices so that they did not stand out from the other singers in the group. But students also described ways that the inherent structure of a choir enabled their sense of MI, providing support for their skill development and reinforcing key learning dispositions such as resilience.

This cross-case analysis also suggested that the dimensions of MI I outlined in my conceptual framework are complex and interrelated. As students develop skills, they are able to perform more musical tasks on their own, bolstering dispositions such as initiative and resilience. Exercising agency in making musical decisions about what to sing and how to sing it can help students apply musical skill in authentic ways, allowing them to see connections between what they learned in choir and in music they make on their own outside of choir. Looking at the data from across all three sites, overemphasis on any one dimension of MI seems to be less beneficial to student development of MI. A balanced approach that attends to skills, dispositions, and agency seems to be the most effective way of promoting MI in choir students.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Study

In this dissertation, I examined how choir teachers and students described musical independence (MI) and what teachers did in choir classrooms to foster it. I wanted to know more about how skills, dispositions, and agency may impact student feelings of MI, and what other factors might enable or constrain it. I guided the study using the following research questions:

4. What are the skills, dispositions, and agentive characteristics of musically independent students?

5. What instructional decisions do teachers make that facilitate or inhibit musical independence?

6. What are the contextual factors that inhibit or facilitate musical independence in students?

To answer these questions, I designed a multiple case study (Yin, 2018) utilizing critical realism (Bhaskar, 2015) as a theoretical and analytical framework. Critical realists seek to explain how a phenomenon happened by considering both potential causal mechanisms and the context within which they may occur (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). Using this lens, I considered the actions of teachers and students as well as potential structural influences upon their actions.

I collected data from three research sites, spending three weeks at each site. Data sources included (1) field notes of classroom observations, (2) teacher journals, (3) student journals, (4) teacher interviews, and (5) student interviews. I analyzed data through the critical realist process of retroduction (Wynn & Williams, 2012) by first making inferences as to probable causal mechanisms for musical independence. In chapter two, I used my research into learner

independence to inform these inferences, which I then adapted and synthesized into a working framework for MI (see Figure 8.1).

Figure 5

Visual Model for Musical Independence in High School Choirs
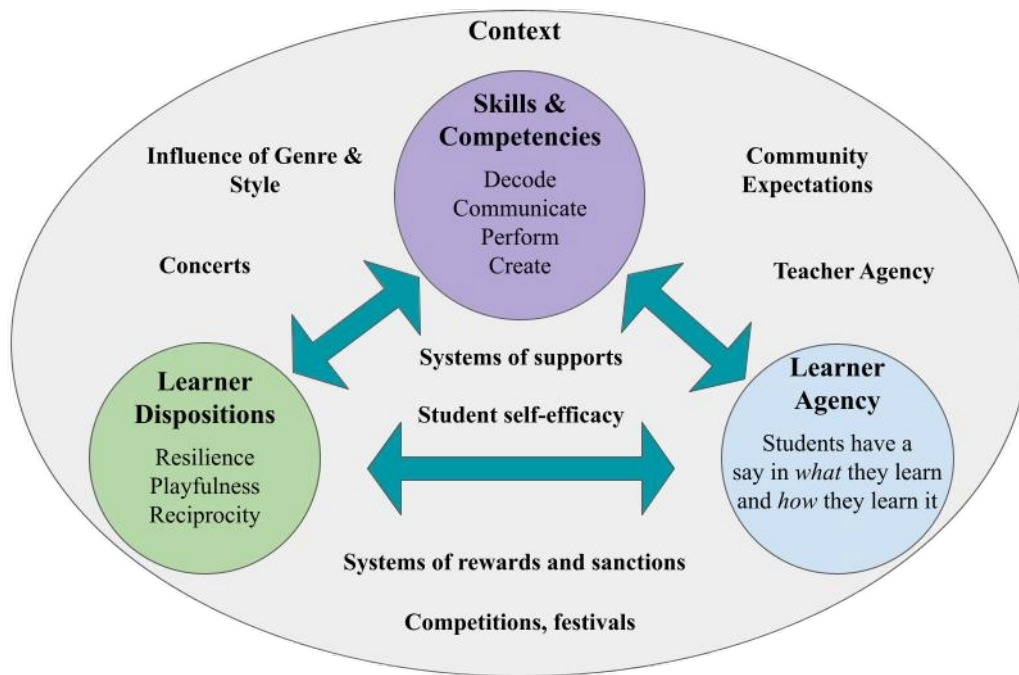
Using data from observations, journal responses, and participant interviews, I wrote three case studies (chapters four, five, and six) that described how the teaching and learning as well as the social interactions I observed at each site may have enabled or constrained MI. I also presented new data that emerged from sites and considered how it might contribute to my framework for MI. Then in chapter seven, I engaged in a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2018) to identify convergent and divergent themes. I found that teachers and students in all three sites mentioned fluency in Western notated music as a primary skill involved in MI. Some students also mentioned the value of learning music by ear, stating that reading music was not necessarily required to be musically independent.

I also found that students believed that communicating emotional intent and expressing one's individual identity were the most important components of MI. Two of the teachers in this study seemed to be successful in creating an environment that supported this expressive dimension of MI. Accordingly, their students reported strong feelings of MI, even when there was evidence that they lacked skills that might support it. A third teacher appeared to be less successful in supporting how her students expressed their emotions in choir. These students reported feeling less musically independent, even though their teacher actively worked to help them build skills (i.e., music theory and literacy skills) that participants agreed contributed to their sense of MI.

In this final chapter, I discuss the structural influences that may have caused participants to view Western music notation as the most important skill involved in building MI and imagine ways of expanding that paradigm. Next, I review recent research into MI and reflect upon how findings from this study may provide new insights into MI and how teachers might support it. Then, I consider implications for teaching practice in choir based on the results of this study. Finally, I propose a way for choir teachers to strike a middle ground in their pedagogical approach to fostering MI in their choirs.

Discussion

Critical realists view the social world as governed by a reciprocal relationship between people and the social structures that they inhabit. According to Bhaskar (1979/2015), society consists of a network of structures and practices that people (i.e., agents) either reproduce or transform through their actions. Scott (2010) used critical realism to explain how structures may impact the actions of agents in educational settings. In chapter one, I introduced Scott's framework which consisted of five types of structures: (1) embodied objects, (2) social

discourses, (3) institutional structures, (4) social markers, and (5) modes of agency. In the next section of this chapter, I consider the structural influences I observed in this study and how they may affect student opportunities to develop MI. Then I discuss how Scott's framework can help explain how participants in this study may have been influenced by underlying social structures that advance a limited view of music literacy and inhibit student experiences of MI.

Social Structures and MI

As I discussed in chapter two, social structures such as capitalism and racism have the capacity to oppress students and create unequal access to resources that can support MI. Additionally, the effects of neoliberalism in music education (e.g., high-stakes music competitions) may lead teachers to prioritize contest results over developing music skills in students involved in lifelong musicianship. Although I acknowledge the potentially deleterious effects of these larger systemic structures, in this dissertation I chose to engage with structural influences that I observed operating in the settings I studied.

By including the role of context in offering causal explanations of observed phenomena, critical realists aim to make strong statements about the social world without laying claim to universal truth. In this study, it is important to note that all three sites were in predominantly White communities. MI in this study may look completely different in another context and may not be experienced in the same way in more racially diverse or economically disadvantaged settings. Therefore, all the reported findings, conclusions, and implications in this study should be understood within the social context of the participants. In the next section, I describe how structural influences may have shaped how this study's participants viewed music literacy and consider potential impacts upon MI.

Structural Influences on Music Literacy

In this study, a Western-centric view of music literacy was a social discourse (Scott, 2010) that influenced the actions of agents. Participants from all three sites shared similar views about the role of Western music notation in developing MI in choir. Specifically, participants viewed music literacy as the ability to decode Western musical notation and transmit its musical meaning through singing. As a social discourse, this Western-centric view of music literacy defined the use of notated scores as essential to how this study's participants made music in choir. Thus, musical scores can be viewed as embodied objects (Scott, 2010)—restrictive impediments with material effects upon the actions of agents. Dependent upon musical scores for transmitting musical ideas to their students, teachers in this study developed learning activities and assessments to improve student skills in Western notational literacy, identifying it as the primary instructional goal of their curricula and a necessary skill to fostering MI. These instructional decisions, in turn, potentially influenced students to believe notational literacy to be the most important skill of MI. Bats' (Southeastern High School student) comment about notational literacy being important for "serious" musicians suggests that a hierarchy of skills may exist in the minds of high school choir students.

Other types of social structures influenced teacher and student perceptions of MI. Institutional structures (Scott, 2010), such as the state vocal music organization, evaluated each choir's ability to sight-sing using Western notation as part of the festival requirement. In so doing, the state vocal music organization created a system of rewards and sanctions based upon the choir's proficiency with Western music notation. The pressure of meeting the standards of excellence promoted by the institution had material effects upon the instructional decisions of the teachers in this study. For example, as they prepared to take their choir to festival, I observed

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each teacher in this study simulate the conditions of the festival sight-singing evaluation in rehearsal. In this way, an institutional structure influenced how agents (i.e., teachers) made instructional decisions related to developing skills involved in MI.

In engaging in this discussion, it is important for me to disclose my positionality on the topic of Western notation as a curricular goal. As a practitioner and performer of choral music, I recognize the importance of Western notational literacy and advocate for its inclusion in US public school music education curricula. What I actively question, however, is the unrivalled hierarchical status of Western music notational literacy as the arbiter of whether or not a student is musically independent. Next, I examine how Western-centric notions of music literacy can limit who and what may be considered musically independent.

Structural Limitations to MI in Literacy-Based Curricula

The ubiquity of Eurocentric aesthetic preferences and Western bias toward notation in US public school music education programs can create a tendency for teachers to exclude other means of music-knowing, a trend I observed in the field during this study. Hess (2017) defined the hegemonic norms of North American music education systems as 1) controlled by the teacher through Western "sensibilities," 2) favoring the replication of music already created by someone else over student creativity, and 3) privileging Western notation over aurally transmitted forms of music learning (pp. 21-22). This latter point is particularly problematic in that it encourages conformity in musical practice and pushes other cultural systems to the margins.

A recent call to explore music from outside of the Western canon has been met with enthusiasm from those wishing to expand beyond the confines of European musical culture. For example, contemporary choral concerts often feature music from South Asian, Central American, and African cultures. However, the pedagogical resources used to access this music most often

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assume the form of written notation, resulting in the re-inscription of Eurocentric symbology upon music traditions that function independently of it. Morton (2010) drew attention to this imposition of Western systems of knowing upon multicultural music, calling the resulting scores "usually little more than essentialized misrepresentations of exoticized cultures" (p. 207).

Dependence upon music literacy may also impose ableist limitations and disable alternative forms of musical knowing. Abramo (2014) critiqued the Western-based ocularcentric system of learning in music education, instead advocating for ways of knowing music through sound. The ideology of ability inherent in Western-centric music literacy privileges those who are sighted and able to decode symbols visually, thereby excluding other recognized ways of learning, such as learning by ear. Limiting MI to the ability to read and perform notated music not only fails to recognize the musical abilities of many students, but it also lessens the musical possibilities for all students. To broaden the model of MI and embrace more ways of being musical, choir teachers may need to redefine the role of music literacy in their classrooms.

Redefining Music Literacy as a Part of MI

Over the past two decades, linguistic scholars have advanced the idea of multimodality (Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2003; Manchón, 2017) as a means of conveying meaning in ways beyond only through text. This may include communicating through images (i.e., visual), sound clips (i.e., aural), hand gestures and facial expressions (i.e., gestural), and physical elements arranged purposefully in order to express meaning (i.e., spatial). Recently, Broomhead (2021) argued for a multimodal approach to teaching music literacy, expanding notions of music literacy to include listening, improvising, conducting, and aurally transmitted musicking traditions. Through a multimodal approach to music literacy, learners interact with music resources that are not in print

format or language based. In so doing, students and teachers can find meaning in the act of negotiating, interpreting, and creating music, not just decoding and recreating existing works.

To enact bold new pedagogies that can expand existing ideas in ensemble music education, choir teachers must feel that they can make instructional decisions that counter structural norms. In his framework, Scott (2010) described how modes of agency may affect an agent's willingness to challenge established practices. These modes of agency are often associated with an agent's sense of identity and feelings of self-efficacy. In music education spaces, a teacher's capacity to enact curricular change may be related to their own musical experiences. Data from this study suggests that modes of agency for teachers may be enabled by opportunities outside of traditional choral music making. Ms. Parker, Southeastern choir teacher, described how her experience as a popular musician influenced her producer-like approach to teaching choir, and led to her developing creative, multimodal learning projects such as cabaret. Through her exposure and training in other forms of music making, Ms. Parker developed the vision and self-efficacy to imagine and implement ways for her students to develop a multimodal sense of MI.

Relating Current Findings to Relevant Research

Results from this study both reinforce and extend recent scholarship on MI in ensembles. In this section, I discuss connections between this study and past research (Harris, 2017; Weidner, 2015, 2020) as well as consider how my findings may offer contrasting insights into MI. Then I close this section by exploring salient differences between MI in choir and instrumental settings.

Social Connections as a System of Support

Similar to Weidner (2015, 2020), I found that the social environment played an integral role in how participants experienced MI. Student participants in both studies described the importance of feeling safe to taking musical risks in front of their peers. There also seemed to be some similarities in how teachers cultivated this environment. In Weidner's study (2015), he explained how Mr. Guss used humor and shared personal stories to build rapport with the band. Likewise, I observed that Ms. Newcomer often took class time to build relationships with her students through social interactions. At Southeastern and Northern High Schools, Ms. Parker and Ms. Fox also prioritized building social connections, but the interactions were typically between students. It seemed that the efforts of Ms. Newcomer to build personal connections with her students contributed to a greater sense of social connectedness at Central High School than in the other sites in my study. By nurturing a supportive and personal relationship with their students, it seemed that both Mr. Guss (Weidner, 2015) and Ms. Newcomer encouraged students to actively look to their teachers for help, potentially providing another level of support for building skills associated with MI.

Transfer of Skills

In past studies (Weidner, 2015, 2020; Harris, 2017), researchers found that giving students opportunities to work in small groups helped them transfer skills they learned in the large group to guide their own music learning. Harris (2017) described this transfer as reciprocal; students also brought the initiative and resilience they developed in self-led music learning back into the large ensemble rehearsal. Although I observed students transferring what they learned in large group rehearsals in student-led settings (i.e., sectionals, cabaret, folk song project), I found less evidence pointing toward students being more independent in large-group settings as a result

of their small group work. In the three sites of my study, it seemed that students were content to let their teachers guide the learning in full choir rehearsals, even though some students may have been able to contribute. This finding suggests that teachers who are interested in supporting MI in large ensemble settings may need to provide explicit opportunities for students to take leadership in rehearsal. Asking leading questions and allowing students opportunities to lead the large group rehearsal may help students apply skills and dispositions involved in MI.

How MI May Differ between Choral and Instrumental Settings

The ways in which students perceive and develop MI may differ between choir and instrumental settings. In instrumental settings, once students develop technical facility on an instrument, they can use the instrument to help them decode difficult sections in the music that they encounter in ensemble music-making. Choir students often lack this important tool for music learning. This may explain why Ms. Fox was motivated to teach students rudimentary piano skills in choir; she understood that the piano could serve as a valuable tool for decoding challenging passages in the music they learned in choir.

Based upon the results of this study, learning music in choir may be more dependent upon aural skills than learning music in instrumental ensemble settings. As Didi (Northern High School) suggested, aural learning may often supersede notational literacy skills in how students learn music for choir. Although some choir students in this study explained that they wanted to develop skills to be more proficient in independently decoding notated music (e.g., Princess #12, Central High School), other students found value in learning music by ear (e.g., Didi, Northern High School). These findings suggest that choir teachers may want to strike a balance between helping students develop aural skills and notational literacy skills in choir. For example, teaching notational literacy in choir may work better without the use of a piano. Building aural skills, on

the other hand, may be more effective without the use of notation. MI in choir is multidimensional, requiring a variety of instructional techniques. Teachers should be mindful of the different ways choir students learn and guide instructional activities in a way that supports intentional skill development.

It also seemed that participants in this study believed singing to be a distinctly personal activity—one that may make choir students more emotionally vulnerable than students in instrumental settings. Ms. Newcomer and Beetle (Central High School), both of whom began as instrumentalists, commented on the heightened sense of emotional vulnerability in choral settings. For them, building a community of trust and rapport in choir was of great importance—meaningful music-making simply wasn't possible without first putting social support in place. Based upon results of this study, it may be that social connection and opportunity for emotional expression are primary drivers of why high school students participate in choir. For the choir students in this study, MI seemed more about what they were able to think and feel about music than what they knew or could do. This observed focus upon personal interpretation and emotional involvement above technical proficiency may be a significant difference between MI in choir and instrumental settings.

Implications

One of my goals in conducting this research was to identify promising practices and areas for improvement to help choir teachers better foster MI in their students. Qualitative multiple case studies can provide rich descriptions of a phenomenon in its real-world context and make observations as to how the phenomenon may occur across contexts. The findings, however, are particular to the participants in each context, and should not be considered as generalizable. In

this section of the chapter, I consider the possible implications of this study for music teacher education and practicing music educators.

Music Teacher Education

Despite recent calls for curricular reform (Austin, 2021; Campbell, et al, 2014), music teacher education (MTE) programs in US colleges and universities have mostly remained unchanged for decades (Alsup, 2016; Williams, 2019). Acknowledging that undergraduate MTE programs may directly influence P-12 teaching practices (Kaschub & Smith, 2014; Tobias, 2013, 2014), pre-service music education courses might be the best venue to introduce promising new teaching practices that can broaden perceptions of MI. Next, I offer suggestions for how music teacher education may support a more comprehensive vision for MI.

Provide Resources for Student-Centered Creative Learning

In this study, I had the opportunity to observe choir teachers in both teacher-directed and student-led contexts. Results from this study suggest that students' sense of MI may be best nurtured through student-centered, creative projects for which they make most or all of the musical decisions. Of the three sites I observed, all gave students opportunities to work on their own in small groups, but only Southeastern High School had students engage in a creative project (i.e., cabaret). Given the recency of the movement to include student-centered, creative projects in ensembles (Allsup, 2016; Norris, 2010; Williams, 2019), it is possible that these learning opportunities were not discussed in some of the participants' MTE programs. To better support students and teachers in developing a multimodal sense of MI, current MTE programs could include pre-service training in how to design and implement creative, small-group projects in choir classes—units similar to the cabaret project at Southeastern High School. Teacher educators might even arrange partnerships or internships with in-service teachers who teach

creative projects so that pre-service teachers could learn from experiences in the field and imagine ways of applying what they've learned in their future classrooms.

Make Music Without Notation

Participants in this study often described MI as being Western-notation dependent. To broaden the perceptions of MI in pre-service choir teachers, MTE programs should provide experiences in making music without notation in music education courses and in collegiate ensembles. This may include but not be limited to improvisation and rote-learning activities in which no musical score is used. Having opportunities to make music without notation can help pre-service music teachers gain self-efficacy in their own aural learning skills so that they may be more successful in teaching these skills to their future students. In this way, MTE programs may provide useful experiences that expand pre-service choir teachers' notions of MI.

Practicing Choir Teachers

A model for musical independence that encourages student musical decision-making, such as the one offered by Shieh and Allsup (2016), could make important contributions to the social and cognitive development of 21st-century students. With constantly evolving technologies and the blending of cultures and ways of knowing in pluralistic societies, it is no longer adequate or ethical for educational systems or individual educators to unilaterally decide what students must know to navigate society. Nor is the passive transmission of institutionally approved knowledge an effective means of educating students. Therefore, I propose that teachers advance a vision for musical independence in choirs that is active, personal, and flexible so that it recognizes multiple modes of musicality. To promote a multimodal vison for MI, I now offer suggestions for in-service choir teachers.

Balancing Large-group and Small Group Learning Experiences

Choir rehearsals need not always consist of a classroom of students sitting in rows, following their teacher's instructions as they learn already-composed music from notated scores. Opportunities for small-group work can help shift the responsibility for musical problem solving to the students, encouraging them to make musical decisions independently. In all three sites, I observed students working on their own in small groups—the cabaret project at Southeastern, the folk song unit at Northern, and sectional rehearsals and sight-singing practice at Central. These student-led rehearsals were sometimes messy and inefficient, but were often the experiences that students described as being most important to their feelings of MI.

Including large-group music making experiences in choir classrooms may still play an important role in helping students develop the skills and dispositions for MI. Results from this study suggested that students learned from their teachers in choir rehearsals and then applied that knowledge in small group settings. By modelling musical skills and behaviors for their students, choir teachers can provide valuable resources for students to draw upon in their own music-making endeavors. Choir teachers interested in fostering MI in their students, however, should carefully consider when to lead instruction and when to facilitate student exploration. Too much teacher intervention could result in teacher-dependent students; not enough teacher guidance could lead to students becoming frustrated and giving up on choir.

Fostering Strong Social Connections

Choir teachers in this study all included activities to help build strong relationships among choir members. These activities included listening games (e.g., Jams at Northern High School), collaborative small group learning projects (e.g., cabaret at Southeastern High School), and opportunities for students to share personal stories with the class (e.g., Tiny Victories at

Central High School). Students in this study reported that the positive social environment in their choirs contributed to their sense of resilience and reciprocity, dispositions included in my framework for MI. Thus, the importance of social connections to MI in choir emerged as a primary finding in this study. Student participants often described how their choir classmates were like family, and that their support helped them persevere through musical and personal challenges they faced in choir. In my observations, I found that the interactions and activities that students believed to contribute to strong social connections often were non-musical, such as class conversations and affirmations I noticed at Central High School. In this study, these social interactions were crucial contextual factors that helped to foster MI in choir. By establishing a classroom environment in which students feel safe to experiment with their voices and explore new skills, choir teachers can help create conditions supportive of MI.

Building Interdependence. Strong social connections may also play a role in building interdependence in choirs. Students in this study reported that the connection they felt to their peers instilled in them a greater sense of responsibility to the ensemble, leading them to work harder to develop independence. They also described giving up some of their independence, adjusting the style and volume of their singing voice to contribute to the ensemble's sound. Without first building rapport and trust with their classmates, it is less likely that students would have developed the type of interdependence that I observed in this study, potentially affecting their sense of resilience and in turn negatively impacting their feelings of MI.

Opportunities for Self-Expression

Perhaps the most salient finding related to student perceptions of MI is the role of self-expression. Results from this study suggest that communicating emotion through music may be more important to student feelings of MI than developing skills. This seemed to be most

prevalent in the data from Northern High School. In my first week of data collection at Northern High School, I was impressed by Wanda's teaching and her attention to developing skills that may be related to MI. As I spent more time at the site and had the opportunity to interview students, I found that the lack of opportunity for students to express themselves musically was affecting their perceptions of MI. Most of the instruction I observed was focused on note and rhythmic accuracy, and students sang their parts on solfege for weeks at a time. It may be that what the students were describing as a loss of MI was actually a lack of engagement brought about by the repetitive nature of the rehearsal. However, findings from the other sites support the idea that students felt more musically independent when they had opportunities to talk about how the music made them feel. Students at Central and Southeastern High Schools explained how their teachers supported their sense of MI by encouraging them to filter their own interpretations of the music into their performance. This added step of asking students to make interpretive decisions about music may contribute to their feelings of agency and enhance their sense of MI. To enable potential benefits to student engagement and positive perceptions of MI, choir teachers should carefully attend to the emotional content of the music students learn in choir and encourage individual interpretation in choral performances.

Suggestions for Future Research

In this study, I investigated the phenomenon of musical independence (MI) in three different choral settings. Although they differed in size, geographic location, and demographics, each site prioritized performance in Western classical music. Therefore, the skills, dispositions, and agential opportunities in the settings I observed may be very different from those found in choirs that perform music that is not dependent upon Western-based notation. Future research

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into non-Western choral practices and participant perceptions of MI could provide valuable insights into broader applications and interpretations of MI.

Another area of interest that I hoped to explore in this study was how MI might contribute to lifelong involvement in music. I found that the bounded nature of each case limited my ability to observe long-term music making habits of participants, making any data I collected speculative at best. To better explain how choir teachers might foster lifelong music engagement, future researchers may consider recruiting adult participants to gauge how their adult music experiences may have been shaped by their experiences in high school choir. Another possibility for studying lifelong music engagement might be a longitudinal study in which researchers track the musical development of high school choir students over time and follow their musical lives after high school. Although a longitudinal study would present considerable logistical challenges, it could provide valuable insight into how choir teachers can encourage lifelong music learning.

An emergent finding from this study that merits further inquiry is the interrelationship of musical independence and interdependence. The two phenomena appeared to be closely intertwined in this study, with participants suggesting each concept as dependent upon the other. A carefully designed study may attempt to disentangle the two concepts, defining the attributes of each and theorizing as to how one supports the other. By exploring this relationship, researchers may point to promising findings for building musicianship in choir students.

A final consideration for future research is to explore the value and utility of the conceptual model of MI that I proposed in this study. Because MI has the potential to hold different meanings for different participants, it is possible that participant descriptions of MI may have been conflated with other constructs such as musical enjoyment or self-expression. Through data collection and analysis, however, it seemed that the framework I designed

adequately described the interrelated and multidimensional nature of MI. Participant experiences added richness to my model, identifying other potential dispositions, such as curiosity and initiative, and highlighting skills such as expressive interpretation and ensemble awareness. It is my hope that future researchers find this conceptual model to be helpful, and that they continue to revise and add to it in ways that promote a better understanding of MI and point to new applications for choir teachers to foster it in their students.

Conclusion

Reform is a necessary element of advancing new ideas to better suit the changing needs of society. Critical realists (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1979/2015; Collier, 1994; Gorski, 2013; Sayer, 1992; Scott, 2010) believe that social structures (i.e., practices, institutions, and conventions) resist change, but that humans possess the agential capacity to either reproduce or transform them. How to channel agentive power in order to bring about productive change remains one of the most fractious topics in music education. There is a tendency among music education scholars to either espouse a burn-it-all-down approach to reform, or promote to preserve current practices in perpetuity. As a veteran teacher and aspiring music teacher educator, I find no utility in such zero-sum solutions. Whenever policy makers push a one-sided agenda, there is another side that ends up completely disenfranchised. In order for there to be meaningful and implementable change, there has to be room for "yes-and" approaches. Do choirs (and other ensembles) sometimes limit what musical opportunities students get to experience? Yes. Should there be more access to secondary general music, songwriting classes, music technology, and guitar in public schools? Absolutely. Can ensemble teachers learn from reformers such as Kratus (2019) and Williams (2019) to find more ways of empowering individuals to make music relevant in their personal lives? Without question. At the same time, it is essential that we

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acknowledge that there are still thousands upon tens of thousands of young people who love singing in choirs. They love building individual skills, but they love doing it with other people. They love singing music that they choose, but they love learning about music that they didn't know before because their teacher introduced them to it. They love standing alongside their peers and being enveloped in a unified sound while still feeling and expressing the music in their own individual way. MI in choirs may be best described by this paradoxical sensation of self-actualization through group experience. By seeking ways to better understand how students experience MI, scholars, music teacher educators, and practicing choir teachers can continue to reshape choral music education to meet the needs of today's students.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear [intended participant/s],

I am emailing you to invite you to be part of my research project about musical independence in choirs. The purpose of the research is to learn more about the skills, learning dispositions, and independent decision-making of musically independent choir students, as well as explore teaching practices and contextual factors that support or inhibit musical independence. This research project is the subject of my PhD dissertation thesis at Michigan State University and is under the supervision of Dr. Karen Salvador.

If you participate in my project, I will conduct observations of the regular classroom activities in a choir class that you teach. I will also ask student participants to complete journal entries and conduct semi-structured interviews with you and no more than four students from that class. Student participation in interviews will be voluntary and require signed parent/guardian consent to participate. Observations will happen over the course of three non-consecutive weeks during a 12-week period. Interviews are planned to last between 30 and 45 minutes and will not exceed one hour in length.

There are no anticipated risks to your participation, and any data resulting from the study including site location, your name, and the names of participants will be completely anonymous. There are no direct benefits to participants, but your participation will contribute to academic knowledge about musical independence in choirs and may identify promising teaching practices that benefit choral music education. Participation is voluntary, but I hope you will choose to be part of this project. For more information, or to sign up, please contact me by email or phone at:

With thanks,

Ben Kambs

PhD Candidate

Michigan State University

APPENDIX B: INFORMED TEACHER PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

We invite you and your class to take part in a research study exploring musical independence in choir. The purpose of the research is to learn more about the skills, learning dispositions, and independent decision-making of musically independent choir students, as well as explore teaching practices and contextual factors that support or inhibit musical independence. This research project is the subject of my PhD dissertation thesis at Michigan State University and is under the supervision of Dr. Karen Salvador.

If you participate in my project, I will conduct observations of the regular classroom activities in a choir class that you teach. I will also ask student participants to complete journal entries and conduct semi-structured interviews with you and no more than four students from that class. Student participation in interviews will be voluntary and require signed parent/guardian consent to participate. Observations will happen over the course of three non-consecutive weeks during a 12-week period. Interviews are planned to last between 30 and 45 minutes and will not exceed one hour in length.

There are no anticipated risks to your participation, and any data resulting from the study including site location, your name, and the names of participants will be completely anonymous. There are no direct benefits to participants, but your participation will contribute to academic knowledge about musical independence in choirs and may identify promising teaching practices that benefit choral music education.

Informed Consent Statement

I, _____, give permission for my Ben Kambs to observe my students, distribute journal prompts, and conduct interviews in a choir class of my choosing for his research project entitled, "In Search of Musical Independence." The study has been explained to

me and my questions answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow the researcher to interview

and audio record my students and me during this study. I understand this audio will only be used

for the purposes of research (e.g. analysis of responses, transcriptions of responses, etc.) and will

not be available to anyone aside from the researcher and his supervisor(s). I understand that my

right to withdraw from participating or refusal to answer any particular questions will be

respected and that my responses and identity will be kept confidential. I give this consent

voluntarily.

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INFORMED ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS

You are invited to take part in a research study. The study is being supervised by Karen Salvador, PhD and conducted by Ben Kambs, a PhD student at Michigan State University, as part of his dissertation exploring musical independence in choir. In this study, participants will complete journal entries and selected students from your choir will be interviewed to help understand how they develop skills that may help them become independent music-makers.

If you agree to complete journal entries, journaling may occur outside of class time. I will electronically send two prompts after each class I observe. You should complete your response within 24 hours. All participants will choose a pseudonym (included in the space below) so that your responses will be private from your teacher. Only I will know the identities of each participant. I will choose interview participants based upon the journal entries. If you are selected for an interview, I will record it so that I can transcribe and analyze your responses. Your answers will not be associated with your name, you will choose a pseudonym. The audio recording of your interview will be destroyed after it has been transcribed. You have the right to stop the interview at any time, or to refuse to answer any of my questions without any consequences from me or from your teacher.

Questions? Please feel free to ask Ben Kambs, the researcher, any questions before signing the consent form or at any time during or after the study. You can contact him at kambsben@msu.edu.

Informed Assent Statement

I have been informed that my parent(s)/guardian(s) have given permission for me to participate, if I want to, in a study about musical independence in choir. By signing here, I agree to participate in the study and am interested in completing journal entries and being interviewed. If

I am selected, I know my participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may

stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect my

grade or relationship with my teacher or the researcher in any way.

Name   _____

Date _____

Pseudonym _____

APPENDIX D: INFORMED PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

We invite your child to take part in a research study exploring musical independence in choir. The study is being supervised by Karen Salvador, PhD and conducted by Ben Kambs, a PhD student at Michigan State University.

Description: In this study, I will conduct observations of normal classroom instruction, collect journal responses, and interview choir students to help understand how they develop skills that may lead them to become independent music-makers. Additionally, their responses may help find ways teachers can better teach these skills, and identify obstacles to learning in choir.

Confidentiality: Your child will complete electronic journal responses through Google Classroom. Their responses will not be associated with their name. Instead, they will choose a pseudonym to protect the privacy of their responses. Only I will know the identity of each pseudonym so that I can pair journal responses with interview data. Your child's interview will be audio recorded so that I can transcribe and analyze their responses. Your child's answers will not be associated with their name. Rather, each participant will be allowed to choose a pseudonym. The audio recording of your child's interview will be destroyed after it has been transcribed.

Freedom to Withdraw or Refuse Participation: Your child has the right to stop journal entries or the interview at any time, or to refuse to answer any of the interviewer's questions without repercussions from the researcher or from their teacher.

Risks & Benefits: This study poses no risks to your child. Because this study seeks to uncover promising teaching practices that encourage musical growth, your child may benefit from reflecting upon their own music learning.

Grievance Procedure: If you have any concerns or are dissatisfied with any aspect of this study, you may report your grievances (anonymously, if desired) to the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University, 4000 Collins Rd., Suite 136, Lansing, MI, 48910. You may contact them at (517) 355-2180 or irb@msu.edu.

Questions? Please feel free to ask Ben Kambs, the researcher, any questions before signing the consent form or at any time during or after the study. You can contact him at kambsben@msu.edu.

Informed Consent Statement

I, _____, give permission for my child, _____ to participate in the research project entitled, "In Search of Musical Independence." The study has been explained to me and my questions answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow my child to answer journal prompts and for you to interview and audio record my child's responses during this study. I understand this audio will only be used for the purposes of research (e.g. analysis of responses, transcriptions of responses, etc.) and will not be available to anyone aside from the researcher and his supervisor(s). I understand that my child's right to withdraw from participating or refusal to answer any particular questions will be respected and that his/her responses and identity will be kept confidential. I give this consent voluntarily.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E: STUDENT JOURNAL PROMPTS
STANDARD INSTRUCTIONS USED IN ALL SITES

We are interested in learning about how choir students develop musical independence. Please respond with as much detail as you can provide to the following prompts about today's choir rehearsal. Your responses are completely voluntary and totally anonymous. We do not know who is completing the form and most importantly, this is NOT a part of your grade. Because we are interested in student responses over a period of time, please choose a pseudonym for your responses and use the same pseudonym each time we journal. Thank you!

For the prompt(s) below, please provide as much detail as you can remember from today's rehearsal. Remember, this is completely voluntary and totally anonymous. You may answer all, some or none of the questions below. Thank you for your help!

SOUTHEASTERN HIGH SCHOOL

Journal Prompts for Week One

1. In a couple of sentences, describe what you think it means to be musically independent.

2. Think about today's activities in choir. Did you find the activities helpful in building skills that lead to musical independence? Why or why not?

3. Describe a time in a choir class when you felt the activities helped support your musical independence.

Journal Prompts for Week Two

1. This week's rehearsals (Monday - Wednesday) were to prepare for a concert on Wednesday night. The last time I was here to visit, you were preparing for a solo recital project. Reflect on how the rehearsal process/goals for each performance project was similar and/or different.

2. Would you consider one of these two projects (solo vs. choir performance) more or less supportive of building musical independence? Why or why not?

3. Reflecting on the skills tests that I saw today, do you find these to be easier or more difficult when you complete the skills on your own (not with the full choir)? Why do you think that might be?

Journal Prompts for Week Three

1. How important is choosing the music that you learn to your feelings of musical independence?

2. What do you most want to learn from choir class?

3. Do you feel like you have the opportunity to learn what you are most interested in learning in choir? Why or why not?

CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Journal Prompts for Week One

1. In a couple of sentences, describe what you think it means to be musically independent.

2. Think about today's activities in choir. Did you find the activities helpful in building skills that lead to musical independence? Why or why not?

3. Describe a time in a choir class when you felt the activities helped support your musical independence.

Journal Prompts for Week Two

1. The last time I was here, you were preparing for contest. How are rehearsals different now from when you were preparing for festival?

2. Would you consider festival preparation rehearsals to be more or less focused on building musical independence compared to rehearsals over the past week?

3. What musical skills did you learn during festival preparation? Do you use these skills to learn music on your own?

Journal Prompts for Week Three

1. How important is choosing the music that you learn to your feelings of musical independence?

2. What do you most want to learn from choir class?

3. Do you feel like you have the opportunity to learn what you are most interested in learning in choir? Why or why not?

NORTHERN HIGH SCHOOL

Journal Prompts for Week One

1. In a couple of sentences, describe what you think it means to be musically independent.

2. Think about today's activities in choir. Did you find the activities helpful in building skills that lead to musical independence? Why or why not?

3. Describe a time in a choir class when you felt the activities helped support your musical independence.

Journal Prompts for Week Two

1. The last time I was here, you were preparing for large group festival. This week, you've been working on a folk song project and on music theory packets. How do these activities contribute toward your feelings of musical independence? Which do you find most helpful, and which is the least helpful? Please explain why or why not each activity might build musical independence.

2. What sort of challenges have you faced in learning the folk songs independently? How can your teacher best support your learning in this project?

3. What musical skills did you learn during festival preparation? Do you use these skills to learn music on your own?

Journal Prompts for Week Three

1. How important is choosing the music that you learn to your feelings of musical independence?

2. What do you most want to learn from choir class?

3. Do you feel like you have the opportunity to learn what you are most interested in learning in choir? Why or why not?

APPENDIX F: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

To help me analyze the data I will learn from you today, I would like to record our conversation. Only I will have access to the recording which will be eventually destroyed after I transcribe it. All information will be held confidential, your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time for any reason, without any repercussions. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. I will pay attention to the time to ensure that we complete this line of questioning.

A. Teacher Perceptions of Musical Independence

1. How would you describe a musically independent choir student?

   Probes: What skills do people need to be musically independent?

   - Besides skills, are there other components of musical independence that you can think of?

   - Is there a difference between being musically independent in choir versus being musically independent in other forms of music-making? If so, how are they different?

   - Think back to your own musical training in choir. What activities did your teacher prioritize? Did your teacher ever mention musical independence as a goal of choir class?

2. Is musical independence important for student participation in choir? Why or why not?

3. What do you hope for your students musically after they leave your choir?

B. Instructional Perspectives

1. What are your most important instructional goals in choir?

   Follow-up: How would you rank student musical independence in terms of importance? Is it more or less important than other goals? How much time do you spend working toward specific goals?

2. What strategies do you use to encourage student musical independence?

   Probes: How do you assess whether students are achieving musical independence?

3. Can you think of any classroom activities you regularly use that make it more difficult to teach musical independence?

4. Does anything constrain you in teaching the musical skills and concepts that you find most important in choir?

C. Contextual Factors

1. Describe the learning environment in your choir classroom. Would you consider it to be mostly teacher-driven instruction or student-centered?

2. Do you think there are times in the year when classroom activities are less focused toward building musical independence? Are there times when it is more focused? What are those times and what factors may cause the change in focus?

3. What do you consider to be the external influences on your instructional decisions?

4. What factors outside of the classroom affect student growth (positive and negative) in musical independence?

D. Open-ended Question

1. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about musical independence in choir?

APPENDIX G: STUDENT SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

To help me analyze the data I will learn from you today, I would like to record our conversation. Only I will have access to the recording which will be eventually destroyed after I transcribe it. All information will be held confidential, your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time for any reason, without any repercussions. Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. I will pay attention to the time to ensure that we complete this line of questioning.

A. Student Perceptions of Musical Independence

1. How would you describe what it means to be musically independent?

   Probes: What skills do you need to be musically independent?

   - Describe a time when you were frustrated by the learning process in choir.

   - Describe a time that was especially fun while learning music in choir.

   - Do you practice your choir music outside of school? Why or why not?

   - Do you make other music outside of school?

   - How much do you or other students have influence on what music you learn in choir?

   - How does the ability to choose what music you study impact your willingness to learn?

   - Is it important for you to have a say in what you learn about music in choir class?

   - Do you feel like you are able to make choices and decisions about music in choir? If so, what kind of decisions/choices can you make?

- Are there other components of musical independence that you would like to talk about?

- Is there a difference between being musically independent in choir versus being musically independent in other forms of music-making? If so, how are they different?

- Would you describe yourself as musically independent in choir? In another form of music-making? Why or why not?

2. Is musical independence important to being an effective member in the choir?

Is musical independence something you are learning/hope to learn from singing in choir?

B. Instructional Perspectives

1. What instructional goals do you think are most important to your choir teacher?

- Follow-up: Is student musical independence an important goal for your choir teacher? Is it more or less important than other goals?

- What other goals do you think your teacher values?

- Follow up: Of the goals you listed, how much time does your teacher spend working toward specific goals?

2. What strategies does your teacher use to encourage you to build musical independence?

Probes: Did they work – why or why not?

3. Can you think of any classroom activities your teacher does that make it more difficult to be musically independent?

4. What type of activities do you think would help build your musical independence?

Follow-up: What skills does a choir member need to be musically independent?

Follow-up: Are these skills important to you in your own musical life?

C. Contextual Factors

1. Describe the learning environment in your choir classroom. Do you feel supported by your peers? Your teacher?

2. Do you think there are times in the year when classroom activities are less focused toward building musical independence? Are there times when these activities are more focused?

   Follow-up: What are those times and what factors may cause the change in focus?

D. Open-ended Question

1. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about musical independence in choir?

APPENDIX H: SOUTHEASTERN HIGH SCHOOL, SKILLS GRID

SHS Choir Skill Testing

You will perform 2 new skills each trimester throughout your four years in SHS Choir.

You will accumulate 24 different skills by the time you graduate!

Table 2

SHS Skills Grid

Major Scales	Minor Scales	Other Scales	Rhythm	Theory
1. Major Scale *D R M F S L T D* *D T L S F M R D*	1. Natural Minor Scale *L T D R M F S L* *L S F M R D T L*	1. Chromatic Scale DoDiReRiMi etc.	1. Rhythm Sheet #1	1. Major Scale Key Signature ID
2. Major Round	2. Natural Minor Round	2. Chromatic Scale Round	2. Rhythm Sheet #2	2. Minor Scale Key Signature ID
3. Major Round with 3 singers	3. Nat. Minor Round with 3 singers	3. Dorian Mode Re-Re	3. Rhythm Sheet #3	
4. Sight-reading pattern: *DRDMDFMD* *SMDLSMDTD*	4. Sight-reading pattern: LTLDLRDL *MDLFMDLSiL*	4. Phrygian Mode Mi-Mi	4. Rhythm Sheet #4	
5. Major Interval Scale: *DRDMDFD etc.*	5. Nat. Major Interval Scale: *LTLDLRL etc.*	5. Lydian Mode Fa-Fa	5. Rhythm Sheet #5	
6. Major Step Ladder *D DRD DRMRD etc.*	6. Nat. Minor Step Ladder *L LTL LTDTL etc.*	6. Mixolydian Mode So-So		

Table 2 (cont'd)

7. Major Step Ladder Round	7. Nat. Minor Step Ladder Round	7. Locrian Mode Ti-Ti		
8. Major 3rds *D M R F M S F L* etc.	8. Nat. Minor 3rds *L D T R D M R F* etc.			
9. Major 3rds Round	9. Nat. Minor 3rds Round			
10. Major 4ths *D F R S M L* etc.	10. Harmonic Minor Scale *L T D R M F *SI L* *L *SI F M R D T L*			
11. Major 4ths Round	11. Harmonic Minor Round			
12. Major 5ths *D S R L M T F D* etc.	12. Melodic Minor *L T D R M *FI *SI LA* *L **SO FA** M R D T L*			
13. Major 5ths Round	13. Melodic Minor Round			

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APPENDIX I: CABARET PROJECT GUIDELINES

Objective: To choose, research, develop, produce and perform a musical selection from one of the songs that has to do with our theme, "time" Seniors may choose to sing a solo of their choice, but are encouraged to pick a song with this theme in mind.

The project must be done in a group of **4-8 students** in the same choir class. The presentation can include dialogue and/or dance but must be no longer than 5 minutes. The final performance will be presented in class before it can be presented on an evening Cabaret. If all written work is turned in by the deadline and the performance is of a masterful quality, the group will be invited to perform at an evening Cabaret.

Table 3

Cabaret Project Guidelines

POINTS	ACTIVITY
10	**One Google Slide** must give program information about your piece: ● Include the name of your song, the artist, composer, the lyricist, arranger, etc. Make sure to spell the names correctly. ● Include historical, cultural or musical background information on the creation or development of the song that may be of interest to the audience. ● Information about how your piece relates to our "time" theme. ● Names of group performers. ● Senior soloists may decide to include a more personalized "goodbye" slide or message with their piece's performance.
10	● Appropriate costumes, concert dress, and props (if needed) for the performance of the scene. ● You can also perform in professional black or a coordinated outfit.
10	● One copy of the **SHEET MUSIC** or a **LYRIC SONG MAP** with your arrangement plan**.** In true cabaret spirit, all acts must be accompanied by piano, sung a cappella, or use a recorded karaoke accompaniment with no other pre-recorded voices. Your recorded accompaniment must be sent to Ms. Price in an MP3 format that she can download.

Table 3 (cont'd)

50	● **(30pts)** A polished performance presented in a professional atmosphere with correct vocal technique (Tone quality, pitch elements, rhythm elements, diction, interpretation, presentation) ● **(10 pts)** Your performance should include some phrases with harmony among the singers. ● **(10pts)** Effective class rehearsal and use of work time in your group.
20	● You **MUST** attend a 10 minute **<u>mandatory dress rehearsal</u>** between 3:00–5:30pm on the day of your Cabaret performance. You do not need to stay for the entire dress rehearsal; there will be a sign up sheet for rehearsal. This is the **ONLY** time we have to set up technical needs for the evening program. If you do NOT attend this rehearsal, you will not be able to perform on the Cabaret.
	Extra credit will be given for: 1. Additional performances (senior solo, HH, TT, Senior groups, etc.) 2. Volunteering for stage crew and tech help.

Due Dates

Monday, April 17 – all karaoke accompaniments are due via email or drive

Thursday April 20 – all Google Slides are due

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

1. We will be performing in the theater, so think about using lighting and the stage platforms in your act.

2. All choir members are expected to be present for their entire Cabaret Night. Choir members will serve as stage managers, prop assistants, and aid with all theater tech help. Seniors can volunteer to serve as hosts. Seniors will write the script for each night. This is why it is IMPERATIVE that we have your information on time.

3. A Cabaret ticket includes a dessert buffet and drink. Each Cabaret will include two acts with an extended intermission for the desserts. The audience will go to the Commons for the desserts

and drinks. Culinary Arts students will set out the desserts buffet style in the Commons and the audience members will go through the line with their ticket to choose their dessert and drinks.

4. <u>Only students performing each evening are allowed in the Choir Room and backstage</u>. DO NOT bring your non-choir friends to the choir room or backstage during Cabaret. Choir members can come to both nights for free.

5. All cabaret props and costumes MUST be removed by **Friday, April 28**.

6. Your slides will be shown on the big screen in the theater before the first Act of Cabaret and during the Intermission. Think about using font sizes and colors that can be clearly read.

7. Some Cabaret acts may be asked to perform on more than one night. Large group Cabaret acts are also needed for finales.

APPENDIX J: FOLK SONG PROJECT GUIDELINES

Goal: Through research, discussion, creative drama and rehearsals each small group will have an in-depth understanding of a folk song, of their choice, and perform it with appropriate vocal technique and with authentic performance practices. The information learned and the musical knowledge gained through research and proper rehearsal techniques will be shared with the class in a presentation. The presentation/performance should be designed in a manner that will engage the audience as well as "teach" the audience specific facts about the selected folk song.

FOLK SONG: _____

BOOK IN WHICH IT IS LOCATED: _____

ORIGINAL ORIGIN:_____

COMPOSER/ARRANGER:_____

GROUP MEMBERS (no more than 4): _____

_____

Project Responsibilities (Responsibilities may be assigned collectively or to individuals):

- Review folk songs and the group must select one song they wish to present. Your folk song must be chosen from a book in the solo/choral library. The song you pick must be new to all members of your group. (2 days)

- Research the national origin of your folk song. All group members must be able to know the historical time period in which the song was attributed as well as any cultural ties to the selection. Some information to consider:

  o Was it used at a special time of year/celebration?

  o Are there any dances/games associated with this particular tune?

- Has the tune been used in contemporary times (i.e., movie, commercial, etc.)?

- If from a non-English speaking country, what was/is the original language?

- Learn your song. Every member of the group must be able to:

  - Count the vocal line rhythm for the entire selection

  - Speak correct solfege syllables in rhythm for the entire selection

  - Sing the melody with correct solfege and rhythm

  - Perform your selection in a polished presentation with good vocal technique

- Develop your presentation/performance for the class. The presentation must include the cultural/historical information as well as a singing performance of your song - all members must participate in the presentation with both speaking and singing. The more creative, the better!!!

FOLK SONG PERFORMANCE GRADING SHEET

Student Name_____

Folk Song_____ Arranger_____

Everyone is equally responsible to know their own portion of the presentation. When singing the folk song, everyone is expected to sing with the proper vocal technique and to sing with confidence.

Grading scale:

A = Consistently (90% - 100% of the time) meets expectations of skill/goal (Excellent)

B = Usually (80% - 89% of the time) meets expectations of skill/goal (Good)

C = Inconsistently (60% - 79% of the time) demonstrates mastery of the skill/goal (Fair)

D = Beginning (50% - 59%) to demonstrate mastery of the skill/goal (Poor)

F = Does not demonstrate mastery of the skill/goal at this time

<u>Grade</u>

Correct Notes/Rhythms   _____

Tone   _____

Vowel Shapes   _____

Body Alignment/Posture   _____

Musicality   _____

Music memorized   _____

Speaking clearly (understanding & projection)   _____

EXAM AVERAGED GRADE   _____