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## Competition and extrinsic motivation in the band classroom: A review of literature and suggestions for educational practice

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Running Head: COMPETITION AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

COMPETITION AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION IN THE BAND  
CLASSROOM: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR  
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
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Public school bands teach students valuable artistic expression as they work together to learn and perform music in instrumental ensembles. Music educators who claim this purpose need to sustain student interest and involvement in band to continue the art form, because band is an elective course in which students join voluntarily. Factors that motivate students to participate in band include the intrinsic desire for music and the extrinsic stimuli for participation, including a large emphasis on competitions.

Competition in various forms has become a central aspect of many band programs including concert band contests, rated solo festivals, and auditions for higher placements within a single band. Before participating in these competitions, band directors make decisions about the uses and purposes of competitive activities in their individual programs including their effect on student motivation, achievement, and long-term commitment to band. Music educators disagree on preferred uses of competition or noncompetition in their classroom goal structures and the resulting consequences.

Competition's role as an extrinsic motivator in a music classroom may uphold or erode the inherent value of music as expression. Music expression includes key elements of technical accuracy, quality of sound, stylistic communication, historical relevance, and emotional involvement. Comments and ratings from judged band contests may not accurately reflect students' application of these factors and may actually limit students in the freedom of self-expression and directors in the range of music studied. As a result, students' genuine, lasting interest in music may shift to a more superficial desire to win.

### **Purpose**

This study serves to review and analyze previous research studies on the uses of competition in public school bands and determine what strategies led students to stay motivated toward the artistic expression of music. A music educator's use of competition has a central effect on his or her philosophy of teaching music involving student participation, selection of students within the program, and the nature of assessment. The study looks for correlating themes among the research, applies the concepts, and makes suggestions on how to approach competition effectively to maximize students' learning experiences, achievement, and enjoyment in order to become lifelong musicians.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Motivation**

Motivation refers to the process of acquiring a need, want, emotion, or impulse that encourages an individual to take action, and band directors strive to make music the source of the desire to perform (Jagow, 2007; Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001). The process of motivating students in education can intimidate teachers by the indefinite strategy of its application, although each teacher finds it essential to engage each student in order to activate high-level learning. An educator's goal is to establish a purposeful learning objective, such as the performance of a march with energy and dynamic contrast, as a need or impulse stimulant from the students' perspective. The stimulants of motivation, or motives, provide the reasons behind human behaviors and point toward a goal based on the person's strongest need at the time. According to Hersey et al. (2001), a person will try to satisfy this pressing need through a form of activity. If a band student feels the need to create beautiful music, the student may

choose to work hard in rehearsal and practice phrasing the music to meet this goal. Similarly, if a band instructor verbally praises a student and the student develops the desire to play well to thank the teacher, the student exemplifies this principle. In Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory, motivated people's actions increase if they experience a positive relationship between their effort and performance, as well as between their performance and valued rewards they receive (Hersey et al., 2001). As our example student exemplifies, a student who practiced phrasing the music expressively and enjoyed the sound of the music created at the performance may have motivation to continue practicing hard for the next band performance. Motivation often has the connotation of positive, caring, and cooperative environments. However, McLelland (as cited in Hersey et al., 2001) stated that some people feel strongly motivated by achievement itself. For these students, cues related to evaluation may elicit greater positive affect, or hope for success, and they try to seek tasks involving a moderate degree of difficulty (Austin, 1988). For those achievement-based students, competition may strongly incite their motivation.

### **Competition**

Competition serves as a challenge at various difficulty levels for band students to overcome. Competition consists of an unconscious struggle between individuals or groups, or alternatively, the known struggle or rivalry among multiple people or groups for the same item or title (Howard, 1994). Two bands working toward earning first place at a marching band competition fall into competition at its heart. Kohn (1986) and other researchers emphasized the view that in competitions, one side wins only at the expense of the other side, which consequently prevents one side from achieving its goals each time. Kohn distinguished between structural competition and intentional competition as striving to win in a designated situation

versus an internal drive to always end on top. Cooperation, on the contrary, involves striving together to reach success with another person or group, rather than working against each other. Many musical educational experiences avoid competitive settings to promote the unity and dependence of the ensemble as a whole.

Howard's (1994) and others' research on student attitudes toward music contests revealed that many students find excitement in the idea of performing at a contest. Rohrer's (2002) article showed overwhelming initial public support of competitions. American culture values competition, so kids grow up around it and often associate it with positive things such as sports. Students often perceive many extra-musical benefits of music competitions including bonding with the "team", accomplishing something great, and traveling to other locations or missing school to perform. Musically, contests theoretically keep students on task and work to build a successful music program by having students listen to other bands perform, receive judges' comments of support and areas to improve, and gain incentive to give their best efforts (Howard, 1994). Unfortunately, much of the original support can diminish when students do not listen to other bands, become stressed and hostile toward one another, or experience unfavorable results when the contest does not go as planned. Despite the potential drawbacks, many believe in fostering students' excitement toward contests.

One major argument in support of competition is the sustainment of high standards. Rochester (2002), a professor of political science and parent who researched and questioned the practices of the American education system, argued against the common practices of inclusion and cooperation by noting that bringing every student to an equal level often brings down the highest-achieving group (2002). Rochester stated that the ideals of cooperative group efforts do not complete their purpose, because the work typically falls predominantly on one or two hard-

working students while the other group members give minimal effort (2002). Although it sounds pleasant to eliminate different student tracking methods, such as the divided honors student classes and non-honors student classes, Rochester (2002) believed combining all students in one heterogeneous class would limit the academic achievement potential of most successful students rather than raising the standard for lower-achievers. This refers to competition within a single school, which could also apply to a single band program.

In a band setting, Rochester's (2002) findings could mean that a single group containing varying ability levels would help a struggling last chair trombone player improve while minimizing the learning growth of an already high-achieving principal trombone player. Rochester's (2002) theories promoting homogeneous classrooms by ability level would advocate for multiple bands per school based on achievement level, rather than one inclusive group containing students of differing ability levels working together. If the top players from each instrument section played in their own exclusive band, they would perform at a higher level than a mixed group. However, Rochester (2002) did not address the resulting effect of this separation on the learning of all the lower-achieving band students comprising the remaining lower band. This option raises a question concerning whether an inclusive or exclusive classroom style will best benefit the most students. Competition may work to maintain higher standards and avoid student complacency, but competition also creates problems capable of undermining its perceived benefits.

### **Drawbacks of Competition**

Unfortunately, competition can easily break Vroom's (as cited in Hersey et al., 2001) observed principles of motivation when the level of effort or progress does not correlate with the

level of performance as perceived by the judge (as cited in Hersey et al., 2001). A band could triple their playing abilities or learn fifty new concepts since the last performance but still receive a low rating or ranking in comparison to another band that had the resources to start at that level. From that point, motivation falters. After the initial loss, motivation increases for a while to overcome the low mark, but when the students see no benefit to this hard striving, no positive result of their work, they give up. Saferstein (as cited in Rohrer, 2002) described this effecting “overconcern for perfection” as a stressor that makes the activity too much pressure without accomplishment (43). For the students, not receiving an expected positive rating or reward, especially one either highly wanted or viewed as securely attainable, becomes as demoralizing as receiving a punishment (Kohn, 1993). Therefore, low-achieving bands, whether highly motivated to perform or not, may pay the costs associated with losing when the adjudicators or other outside sources eliminate the possibility of attaining the numerical goal they desired.

**Only motivates the highest achievers.**

Competitions in which different groups of students face off against each other have only shown to increase motivation for students with high self-esteem and the highest level of achievement. In a study by Austin, (1988), elementary band students performed in a solo contest in which half of the students played competitively for a rating while the other half played noncompetitively for written comments only. Before and after the contest, students were tested for musical achievement level, motivation, and attribution. Students with the highest levels of self-esteem experienced greater motivation from the competitive option; however, students with lower levels of self-esteem showed increased motivation from the comments-only performance (Austin, 1988). This supports the idea that competition only motivates the “winners”, or at least



the students who believe they have a viable chance of winning. Students who choose to continue in band at the college level often experienced success in music in high school, which implies that their achievement or interest has reached a high level (Rohrer, 2002). Arnwine (as cited in Rohrer, 2002) conducted research in 1996 that showed no significant difference in postsecondary music participation between competitive and noncompetitive high school band programs (Rohrer, 2002). However, generally, a larger percentage of college music majors come from noncompetitive band programs (Rohrer, 2002). Even among the higher-achieving students, this potentially suggests that the non-competitors had a higher level of confidence in their abilities or a higher degree of motivation to continue toward a career in music. Most college ensembles do not compete in contests, so college music participants need a high degree of intrinsic motivation for performing music itself beyond the extrinsic motivation to “win at music” in a competition. Students coming from noncompetitive situations in high school logically would not miss a lack of music contests in college as much as students trained in highly competitive high school programs.

As visible in Austin’s (1988) study, students who have lower levels of achievement in a competition or lower self-esteem begin to show decreased motivation for an activity and attribute their success or failure to uncontrollable factors rather than effort (1988). Saferstein (as cited in Rohrer, 2002) studied competition in a sports context and discovered drawbacks for lower-achieving participants. Competition can increase stress, especially in students who previously executed poorly in competitive atmospheres, and may lead these students to discontinue or avoid involvement in the activity all together (Rohrer, 2002). The primary reason elementary students quit band is due to fear of failure, which may enter the scene by an unwarranted level of competition. The added pressure of competing may have also contributed to elementary

students' lower levels of performance accuracy by the distraction of anticipated outcomes. Austin (1988) connects this phenomenon to "task-outcome preoccupation" within a competitive goal structure as documented by researchers in general education (Ames, 1981 & Ames, 1984). The long-term effects of this elementary competitive atmosphere could explain children's accelerated switching of attributions from effort to uncontrollable factors (Austin, 1988). Between sixth and seventh grades, children experience a shift in attribution, or their perceived causes of success or failure, away from effort (Austin, 1988; Howard, 1994). Effort and affect comprise the valuable attributions associated with intrinsic motivation which help maintain lasting interest in music rather than the fleeting search for rewards or acceptance of human nature's limitations.

#### **External sources define students' worth.**

Giving students a ranking for their performance takes the control out of their hands and into someone else's, the adjudicators', to determine their behavior (Kohn, 1993). While judges may offer very useful feedback, scores often become inflated or catered toward a specific overall rating, which calls into question the credibility of the judge's opinion in which students and teachers place so much power (Hash, 2012). This competitive system often makes one set of raters the defining factor of a band student's sense of self-worth and musical value. When a band consistently receives lower ratings than expected, students no longer feel responsible to fix the things they performed incorrectly and instead place blame on an external factor, such as the judges or their nerves. Conversely, when students see their performance as a direct result of the quality of effort they put forth, they see the value in that ethic and want to continue to work hard to achieve success.

In the same way, rewards such as the desirable high rating become controlling “by seduction” as much as punishments (Kohn, 1993, p. 51). Kohn (1993) described the possibility of an external reward as a bribe that manipulates the participant as much as the threat of a punishment. For example, a mother offers her daughter a candy bar if she behaves at the grocery store. Another day, she warns her daughter she will have to do extra chores if she does not behave at the store. In either situation, the daughter feels compelled to behave for a specific external purpose. If the external factor, whether the candy-bar incentive or the chores punishment, is no longer in the picture, the daughter has no controlling reason to behave at the store. According to behaviorist B. F. Skinner’s theory of operant conditioning, the addition of the candy bar creates positive reinforcement, or the inclusion of a favorable outcome afterward to strengthen the preceding behavior (Ormrod, 2011). Many educators view positive reinforcement as a good thing, as when offering praise to students, but Rochester (2002) argued that its overuse leads to overtly extrinsic, manipulative learning. Students, driven solely by the immediate effects of their behavior, act simply, as animals would, and lose the motivation to perform the task when the offer of a reward no longer exists.

Along with treating students as behavior-driven humans to manipulate, these strategies, when not used carefully, can diminish the value of the content of their education. Theoretically, the daughter in the above example has not learned the inherent value of behaving in a store, because her parents have only taught her to view the action in terms of what she can gain from it. In schools, response-driven behaviors make the educational subject means to an end rather than an end in itself (Kohn, 1993). An exaggerated focus on competition in a band classroom can take an elective subject typically viewed as fun and make it into only another source of winning something rather than an enjoyable activity.

**Extrinsic motives undermine genuine interest.**

Extrinsic motivation through the possibility of adding an award to an intrinsically motivating activity can actually decrease overall student interest. It would be one thing if extrinsic rewards simply did not increase student learning, but rewards actually debase the kind of motivation that does help (Kohn, 1993). “The overstimulation of ‘already-enthusiastic’ performers may have created a state of ‘underachievement’,” (Austin, 1988, p. 174). When outside incentives are added, people actually complete less work, because they realize the minimum amount necessary to receive the award and then see no reason to continue. For example, music students may only practice their music when a contest is scheduled in the near future and stop practicing afterward. Within one band, a band director requiring three scales for a playing test diminishes students’ probability of practicing the other nine. When a competitive goal takes the forefront of their minds, this addition can effectively make students forget that they used to enjoy practicing simply for the sake of playing their instruments.

Kohn (1993) described this devaluing of an activity when viewed in this light: “anything students are told they have to do in order to be rewarded may come to be seen for that very reason as something they wouldn’t want to do if given a choice” (148). Even if students truly enjoy reading, for example, but find themselves entering a summer reading project requiring twenty minutes of reading per day, the joyous activity may transform into just another item on a checklist (Jagow, 2007). Situations such as these highlight the importance of band teachers’ attitudes and goal priorities and how they portray these toward students. Adults create summer book projects with good intentions of encouraging students to read more. Unfortunately, the primary focus often becomes reading for the prize. However, student attitudes toward band

competitions become more complex than simple rewards, because the reward directly involves the activity itself, and students must work together to perform well and receive high honors.

Teachers who overemphasize performance compared to learning risk encountering the motive shift in students. This becomes complicated for instrumental musicians whose learning often comes through performance. While performing for its own sake as in a concert may become an extrinsic reward, performing in a competition takes it to yet another level. Rohrer (2002) explained, “Competition focuses attention and energy on an external force—the fellow competitor—rather than the performance at hand” (43). Whether the external motivator is the top score at a competition or the other competing groups, competitive ensembles drift students’ focus away from music itself. A competition can become overstimulation and push a student past his or her point of optimum performance if intrinsic motivation was previously present (Austin, 1988). The teacher should make the daily journey of learning new musical works and concepts a very exciting part instead of fixing attention solely on the final performance, or at a lower level, even making competition the subject matter (Kohn, 1986).

**Contest preparation teaches less content.**

Although many questioned parents, students, and directors viewed competition as a motivator which drove students to a higher level of achievement and excellence, these perceived benefits fade when one examines the content students actually learn to perform. Students performing in a band contest mastered specific technical abilities pertaining to their specific performance, such as the notes and dynamics in the two pieces of music chosen for large-group contest, at the expense of a much larger range of musical skills (Rohrer, 2002). The large amount of time necessarily spent on perfecting a limited amount of music for the contest took

away from expanding students' knowledge of other styles, historical periods, and broader ranges of musical expression.

Studies on music contests have shown inconsistent results on achievement, but various occasions have shown slightly increased aural-visual discrimination scores for solo contest participants over noncompetitive participants (Howard, 1994; Austin, 1988). Austin's (1988) study with elementary students displayed increased pitch and rhythm identification scores for the group competing against standards as shown by a Music Achievement Test 2 taken after the performance. However, this group received lower performance ratings than their noncompetitive counterparts. Austin (1988) believed the discrepancy could stem from the competitive group performing written techniques more accurately but performing less musically, which supports the preceding point that preparation for a contest can easily emphasize specific skills over a larger range of musical elements.

Howard's (1994) study on the effects of competition on achievement and group productivity revealed an increase in quantity and efficiency in learning but a noticeable decrease in the quality of the performance. Kohn (1993) noted the same phenomenon occurring as a general application to life: "*Rewards usually improve performance only at extremely simple – indeed, mindless – tasks, and even then they improve only quantitative performance*" (46). Behavioral rewards such as teaching a dog to sit in order to receive a treat may work, but reinforcement by rewards undermines complex, open-ended thinking and creativity, all of which are desirable in making music. This agrees with findings in general education in which competition increases the learning of basic-level tasks and the speed at which tasks are completed, but it neglects the depth needed for quality on more complex assignments (Howard, 1994). As mentioned in Rohrer's (2002) article, Temple also found that students from the

noncompetitive bands scored noticeably higher than those from the competitive bands on the Colwell Music Aptitude Test, once more suggesting that students in noncompetitive programs have more opportunities to learn a greater amount of music pedagogy in greater depth than those preoccupied with winning a competition. Austin (as cited in Rohrer, 2002) goes as far to say that “education becomes a serendipitous byproduct, rather than a primary goal” for music directors and those involved who primarily seek the material and social rewards of contests (42). Directors’ purposes for entering contests ideally center on strengthening their students’ musicianship, teamwork, and motivation, but sometimes their subconscious external motives sway students’ motives to less admirable intentions.

#### **Selfish motives.**

Band directors’ purposes for entering music contests have shifted from improving student education and performance to personal recognition or job security in far too many cases. The first state music contests, All-Kansas school music contests, began in 1915 under Frank A. Beach in order to encourage the growth of the participants toward excellence rather than seek victory over each other. In 1926, a long-time adjudicator at a National Conference of Music Supervisors meeting expressed his support of competitions because they developed better teaching (Rohrer, 2002). Unfortunately, contest ratings became an easy way to measure the skill of the band director, not only for prestige in the music world but for evaluating teacher effectiveness. In recent years, student achievement and assessments have grown to higher levels of significance with policies including “No Child Left Behind”, and classes such as band that often do not include formal written assessments have been considering other methods of defining teacher effectiveness (Hash, 2012). As a result, Temple’s study (as cited in Rohrer, 2002)

discovered that younger band directors often focused a great deal of their time on music contests and securing high ratings in order to gain acceptance and reputation in the community. Even “public relations and personal and motivational benefits” of high ratings that make the band instructor or school look prestigious took precedence over music learning and the intrinsic motivation that it brings (Rohrer, 2002, p. 44).

Additionally, everyone involved in decisions concerning contest participation tends to fall into tradition and desires to do “what they have always done”, whether or not empirically-based research shows better results from those actions. Rohrer (2002) quoted Austin who described society’s justification of competitions in music more by positive perceptions than evidence in practice. Society views competition as a great mark from the past, a measure of worth, and a method of recognizing valiant effort (Rohrer, 2002). Austin (as cited in Rohrer, 2002) scientifically investigated competitions beyond these popularly-held beliefs. Society ignores the negative psychological effects on students such as anxiety, avoidance behavior, or loss of interest in the subject after repeated failure, not to mention negative interactions among students that can develop. However, many people still view competitions positively only from their personal background or learned perspective.

At a more basic level, Austin’s (1988) elementary students preferred to repeat the same type of performance they previously completed, whether competitive or noncompetitive, simply because they knew what to expect. He deduced the following conclusion: “From these findings and the research of others, (Burnsed, Sochinski, & Hinkle, 1983; Rogers, 1982), one might conclude that a student’s desire to compete is more a reflection of the familiarity, conditioning, or externally imposed pressure, rather than an ‘innate need’,” (180). Competition is rooted in many of America’s cultural values, including the strength of the individual, and as a result many



kids may have learned these morals from their parents, as well. Howard (1994) found older high school participants rated the value of competitions the same whether they earned high or low ratings, which may support the same internal values of competition. Although noncompetitive performances promote more wide-ranging musical achievement, student desire for competition and the insignificant differences in many results of studies comparing the two make an argument against the total abolition of contests.

### **Cooperation**

Instead of turning students against each other and weighing one side's success based on another group's failure, many researchers have found cooperation as a natural alternative to accomplish large-group goals. Campbell (as cited in Kohn, 1986) conducted research in his school to decrease high levels of grouping, comparing, and rank-ordering students after an inspiring experience in a British elementary school in which the students had no idea which of their classmates was the smartest. To remove the competitive situations, Campbell (as cited in Kohn, 1986) determined to "end the destruction of others' work" and promoted helping one another, and students quickly showed signs of higher self-esteem. The success of the students' newfound cooperation in the classroom became evident less than a month later as they fearlessly welcomed adults, happily displayed their class work, and willingly shared about their lives without the insecurity of being forced to prove themselves or labeled based on their achievement level (Kohn, 1986). This confidence displayed in a band room would provide significant benefits to students' musical expression as they play out their parts freely and focus on making music over following all the rules strictly or measuring up to others. When the students began to

view themselves first as people, not as a ranking against each other, they felt confident in themselves and began to relate to others more comfortably.

Cooperation relates to the intrinsic motivators of caring for individual students and entrusting them with responsibilities and high expectations to empower them. Collaboration both between teachers and students and among the students themselves gives them a reason to work hard. Kohn's (1993) three main principles of motivation included the standard of collaboration. The teacher should include students in making decisions about their behavior or completing tasks to benefit the whole class (Kohn, 1993). Asking the student about a behavior problem and coming to a mutual understanding can create a much more lasting change than blaming the child without listening or giving an explanation (Kohn, 1993). Similarly, a student asked to provide a musical decision, such as choosing to play short or long articulation in a given section of a piece, increases in responsibility and personal importance to the band's progress, which motivates the student to live up to the achievable high standard created.

A study completed by Lawler III (1990) clearly showed the increased motivation of janitors given direct input on the problems in their workplace and responsibility for their implementation. In the same manner as teachers and students, managers who value their employees, treat them as mature, intelligent adults, and give them responsibilities and high expectations find much increased performance over those who view their workers as lazy and incompetent. The superintendent over those janitors showed trust in the janitors' expertise and knowledge of the situation and chose to cooperate with them to solve a problem. The superintendent appreciated the value each worker brought to the table, and this confidence led to vast changes in their behavior, including meticulous testing of new cleaning supplies, taking pride in their work, and completing tasks much more efficiently.

To promote a caring, collaborative environment among peers, students ought to have activities and tasks that involve seeing another student's perspective or offering help to a partner. Teachers who get to know their individual students can give them roles based on their strengths and help them feel needed by the class, which becomes highly motivating. For example, two students can always have the responsibility of relaying homework assignments to the other in case of an absence. Kohn (1993) stated the following about this essential interdependent classroom environment:

If children feel safe, they can take risks, ask questions, make mistakes, learn to trust, share their feelings, and grow. If they are taken seriously, they can respect others. If their emotional needs are met, they have the luxury of being able to meet other people's needs. (239)

A caring environment promotes intrinsic motivation, or the want to take part in an activity for its own sake based on the satisfaction the activity brings. Instead of focusing on what they have to do to win against the other kids and succeed competitively, students can take risks, open up and ask questions, and find worth in the class or activity itself.

### **Competition as Effective Extrinsic Motivation**

Competition starts to become beneficial when teachers approach it purposefully as an appropriate form of extrinsic motivation. Jagow (2007) defined extrinsic motivation as the involvement in an activity primarily for the rewards received rather than for the benefit of the activity on its own. According to Johnson (1992) and other research, extrinsic motivation works effectively when teachers reward students for going above and beyond their class expectations. If a student chooses to organize band uniforms during study hall each week, the teacher shows her gratitude by offering an external reward. However, if a teacher gives external benefits for

something students should already do, such as practicing their instruments every week, the students may actually let that control them and decrease their effort to the minimal level that will earn the reward (Jagow, 2007). Intrinsic motivation should follow musical and problem-solving tasks so the students' competence and enjoyment of music may propel them forward. Jagow (2007) mentioned an example studied under a U.S. News and World Report in 2000 in which rewards caused students to lose an intrinsic desire to read when their thinking shifted to read only for the reward. Teachers' passion for their subjects and focus on the value of the content, such as music's aesthetic value, can help prevent this limited work ethic in students.

Teachers could approach competition as an appropriate form of extrinsic motivation, because in order to participate in large-ensemble concert band or marching band contests, students have to spend additional time going beyond typical school expectations to accept this larger-scale challenge. Howard's 1994 dissertation on student attitudes toward instrumental music contests showed that situations placing students against others improved their attitudes toward music. Results showed more highly increased motivation from solo and small ensemble contests than concert band or marching band contests. Howard (1994) attributed her findings to the following: "Motivation may be stronger for small ensemble and solo contests because students perceive a greater responsibility for the final performance and perhaps a greater sense of accomplishment, due to higher levels of personal accountability" (137). The same idea of increased motivation resulting from increased student responsibility levels correlates between these extrinsic competitive situations and the cooperative environments mentioned above.

### **Cooperation within Intergroup Competition**

In instrumental music, external competition may consequently require increased cooperation among students in one school's band in order to perform at the highest possible level. Perhaps the perfect balance of cooperation and careful competition could motivate the most. A widely-perceived drawback of competitive classroom environments involves the idea defined by Kohn (1993):

If we are serious about raising children to be caring people, we must move away from environments that require them to defeat each other in order to be successful – or at best, to ignore each other – and establish structures where they come to take responsibility for one another instead. (243)

Within one band, students must take responsibility for one another in order to create a work of music together, whether preparing for a performance or additionally for a competition. In marching band, for example, 120 perfect marchers combined with 20 struggling beginners would not likely win first place. The 120 would need to take responsibility to help lead and strengthen the weaker marchers to make the band a better competitor.

Howard (1994) explained “cooperation-within-intergroup competition structure” in depth based on her survey results of Iowa high school band students (139-140). The majority of the students found music contests motivating, fun, significant, and leading to further musicianship. Howard (1994) described the cooperative elements of the music classroom as working collaboratively toward a shared result due to group goals and rewards for combined efforts. The cooperative elements inherent to music competitions such as group productivity and achievement quality may minimize the negative effects of competition on the ensemble (Howard, 1994). For example, fear of failure is less common in large-group music contests than other competitive

situations, because students do not view the contest as immensely personal or their excitement for the contest outweighs the drawbacks.

Establishing the presence of cooperation within competition does not change the identity of contests as extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation for playing music. Initial extrinsic motivation, when approached correctly, can lead to intrinsic motivation in the future and can give bands a musical goal to work toward, which shows that extrinsic motivation is not all bad (Howard, 1994). Austin's (1988) comparative study of elementary band students showed no significant difference in intrinsic motivation levels between the competitive and noncompetitive groups, as shown by self-reported scores of one's "intrinsic interest in music" (IIMS) (176). Similar neutral scores have been found throughout the field and raise questions such as: "if competition does not increase motivation, why have them?" or conversely, "why banish contests when their motivational results match cooperative efforts but add an additional extrinsic kick?"

Howard (1994) advised that the combination of intergroup competitions with intragroup cooperation may provide the benefits of both goal structures simultaneously, noting that most real life situations combine both competitive and cooperative aspects. A company trying to sell a product would require teamwork between involved members but ultimately competition among the businesses selling similar products. Educational goals in cooperative learning such as "cohesion" are met in band competitions, as Howard (1994) uses that same word "cohesion" to describe a band's united display of performance in a contest. Though differing from general education, music ensembles offer cooperative goal structures inherently as students act as co-creators of music, whether or not the band engages in external competitions.

### **Research Methods**

This study completed an extensive review of literature applying directly to motivation and competition in band classrooms and other general settings. First, I identified relevant literature by searching library databases and scholarly journals online with search terms including “music competition and motivation”, “motivation in education”, “extrinsic motivation”, and “band motivation”. The resources available to members of the National Association for Music Education provided many of my sources. I searched primarily original research or research-based articles, supplemented by occasional peer-reviewed articles. I chose literature concerning theories of motivation, motivation in education, general studies on competition or collaboration, and studies specific to instructional choices and student responses in music education. I focused as much as possible on more recent research from the last twenty years, but I reviewed any quality, pertinent studies I found. After choosing and carefully reading useful articles, books, and dissertations, I aligned different findings and looked for correlating themes among these multiple sources. I analyzed the information offered in the studies and applied them to school bands in general to see how the findings would positively or negatively affect school band programs. Using synthesis, I further combined components of successful band programs to offer my suggestions for educational practice in school band programs regarding student motivation and the use or disuse of competition.

### **Suggestions for Educational Practice**

#### **Director Perspective on Competitions**

Band directors’ attitudes and approaches to competitions can make or break students’ motivational influences. Howard (1994) stated that children who already possess a great deal of

drive to play music for its own sake may not “need competition as an incentive to learn” (15). Would participation in a music contest hinder that student’s interest level? If viewed as an end-all, I believe it could, as intrinsic motivation is drained by an overbearing extrinsic reward offer. An extrinsic motivator that functions to control behavior can decrease intrinsic motivation, but if an extrinsic motivator functions to acknowledge or build competence, intrinsic motivation can increase (Howard, 1994). If a director focuses on learning a wide range of musical concepts to a deep level and perceives the music contest as simply an outlet to show the valuable musical ideas the students learned, intrinsic value in music will not likely disappear. The impact of the teacher’s vision compares to a coach who either cares only about winning or chooses to focus on the skills and cohesion developed which can become evident through a game. As mentioned in an earlier argument, research shows that extrinsic rewards become beneficial when given for progress made above and beyond the amount typically expected by students. If teachers view competitions in this light, as an added performance of their music, consequently a little encouragement from a judge, rating, or audience members may not hinder their true purpose for entering.

### **Noncompetition Promotes Central Intrinsic Motivation**

If a band in question does not currently offer many extrinsic motivators, the teacher should not feel compelled to add them. A successful band with a high level of student interest without excessive external rewards can create an ideal learning situation. Intrinsic motivation proves stronger and more lasting than any separate, external reward, because students see the value of making music (Kohn, 1993). However, if few students participate or show interest in band or if multiple students drop out, consider adding external motivators directly related to



music. If the external reward is music, than whether students find inspiration from the intrinsic or extrinsic factors, they desire musical benefits. Kohn (1993), though disagreeing with most anything competitive or externally-rewarding, found that extrinsic rewards directly matching the intrinsic activity at hand can minimize the negative effects he described. Students who make progress at all of their lessons could have the opportunity to play their solos in front of the large group, for example, which makes “performing a solo on the instrument” into the extrinsic reward. Competitions such as these, in which there is no limited number of “winners”, provide more motivation and fewer negative attitudes than competitions for one winning place (Kohn, 1986). Kohn (1986) disagreed with the terminology of “competing against oneself” but the concept of bettering oneself, whether truly considered “competition” or not, creates a positive goal structure (41).

### **Competition for Musical Growth and the Audience**

Additionally, high school bands could attend music contests to gain a larger perspective of their playing abilities and enjoy the opportunity to perform for other musicians, which may or may not occur at the school’s band concerts. As mentioned above, high-achieving students, students with a predominant achievement-motivation, or task-oriented students may gain a great deal from competitions without losing their intrinsic desire for music, simply because they see the competition as another rung on the musical ladder and want to climb to greater heights. Studies consistently showed a higher level of desire for music through competitive situations for the highest-achieving group, and teachers do not want to neglect the educational growth of this group either (Hash, 2012; Rochester, 2002). Focusing on performing for others and transferring the composer’s ideas to a form receptive to what the audience needs and feels adds another

selfless meaning to music-making. Contests create another opportunity for students to perform for an audience, and the contest audience often includes many fellow instrumentalists, which can build brotherhood and mutual appreciation. Hash (2012) asserted that contests are shown to promote increased interest, positive attitudes, and morale among successful schools.

The director's approach must carefully articulate his or her purpose; otherwise "competition" can easily become the final goal, even when the director intends for group accomplishment of music at a high level (Kohn, 1986). Hash (2012) found increased levels of intensity in teachers preceding contests. Though Hash (2012) did not mention student stress levels, a director's mind-set can easily transfer to the ones directed. Additionally, the positive motivational influences mentioned for high-scoring bands can become the opposite, decreased student retention and negative feelings toward the band program or band director, when only low scores are reached (Hash, 2012).

### **Performance for Comments Only**

Hash's (2012) research on interrater reliability examined bands that did and did not participate in an adjudicated music contest for the South Carolina Band Directors Association. Of 187 total public schools in the state, only 91 participated in the contest, and eight more bands dropped out in the weeks preceding the contest even after reserving a time slot (2012). Hash (2012) inferred that directors of less-accomplished groups may not have wanted to risk hurting the band's morale or the director's own reputation by attending a contest and not scoring highly (96). The overwhelming number of I (Superior) and II (Excellent) ratings awarded at this contest, alongside many others, may be due to the fact that predominantly only bands confident of performing well choose to participate (Hash, 2012).

To remedy this pattern, Hash (2012) recommended that less confident bands, or the bands concerned about the unfavorable outcomes of competition, choose to participate in contests for “comments only”. Bands could partake in contests the same as rated ensembles except the defining number at the bottom of the judge’s comment sheet remains blank. This option bypasses the negative aspects of the system by giving the band a performance to work toward and providing them with high-quality, expert judges’ comments for improvement and growth without reducing them to a number ranking or rating against other bands. Smaller or lower-achieving bands could benefit greatly from the expert advice which they would miss by refraining from involvement all together. Hash (2012) also recommended that contest sponsors offer workshops for new band teachers or for those working under challenging circumstances to shrink the musical achievement gap and improve overall music education. Multiple events, such as these, added to the standard contest could open doors to equalize opportunity for those who may feel threatened by competitions.

### **Avoid Competition within a Single Band**

Furthermore, music education supports the research against competition when it occurs within a single music group. Performing in large-group music competitions, even “against” other bands, promotes cooperation with the single ensemble to produce a better whole. However, this intergroup competition can sometimes lead to intragroup competition, or the turning of individual band members or sections against others within the same band, which shows few positive results on student attitudes or motivation for music (Kohn, 1993). Band students often have auditions or another criterion to place them in specific chairs in the ensemble in order of playing ability. Sometimes students have the opportunity to “challenge” the player

one chair better than them to try to perform at a higher level and overtake their position. Jagow (2007) made the research-based claim that challenges against another individual student for a higher chair placement in the band only decrease the overall motivation and collaboration of the band, because the challenge forces students from the same instrumental section against each other and makes them focus on the competition more than the inherent value of music-making together in the first place. A study by Miller (1961) comparing a group completing tasks for monetary rewards with a group completing the same tasks for nothing showed increased stress, more time expended, and slightly decreased abilities for the group working for a reward. Students would do better having playing tests that focus more heavily on individual students' abilities against themselves to increase their personal musical ability than in the attempt to overtake a fellow musician.

### **Make the Best of any Necessary Two-Band Division**

Many school bands pride themselves on accepting everyone, unlike typical athletic teams that often involve only a limited number of players at a time and place the remaining teammates on the bench. School music ensembles can potentially allow everyone to play at all times. In schools with high numbers of student participants in band, exceeding numbers logistically possible for one large group, teachers must decide how to divide the band and form multiple ensembles. The teacher can hold auditions and form two bands based on merit, the top ensemble including the top players and the bottom ensemble taking the remaining students. On the contrary, directors could divide the band in half by another determining factor, such as the ages of members. Many schools have a 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade band and an 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade band. Although the former, more competitive option may increase stress, turn students against one another and

decrease rapport, the second arbitrary option may let students fall into complacency. Opponents of competition would argue that an inclusive band could gain more by cooperation and intrinsic motivation without extrinsic pressure and form a successful ensemble despite odds. Critics including Rochester (2002) believed that heterogeneous groups combining different levels of merit or achievement such as the age-determined bands provided little additional benefit to the lower groups while holding back the highest achievers from going farther as musicians. Rather than offering one right and one wrong answer, teachers can use the results of research to improve motivation and achievement of their bands in whichever method they used to divide them.

If a teacher divides a band into two based on achievement levels of students, the top band will most likely feel motivated by their extrinsic success built on a solid foundation of a love for music, but the problem will lie in motivating the lower band (Jagow, 2007; Howard, 1994; Hash, 2012). Those lower-scoring students may feel demoted or less important and develop negative outlooks if the director does not act intentionally to withstand those outcomes. Some suggestions include offering the second band leadership positions such as section leaders and other roles not based as heavily on achievement, playing music that appears more technically difficult or more interesting to play, and providing some opportunities not available in the upper band, such as its own concert or additional small group arrangements. Additional research is needed to support this concept of motivating the lower-achieving band, but the director's attitude of excitement and high but reachable expectations can reignite the fire in these students to create powerful music. They will have many more opportunities for prominent roles in the ensemble with a smaller group than if the two bands combined as one.

Bands divided arbitrarily by factors such as student grade levels rely on no extrinsic motivators and may require special attention and hard work to bring all players up to a high

level, provide motivation for students to consistently work toward achieving their personal best even without the hope of making a top ensemble, and keep the most successful students wanting to work for their best even when the musical achievement gap may seem large. As heavily supported above, cooperation is a powerful tool to motivate students. This division of ensembles can eliminate the fear or disconnect that can occur within competitive atmospheres. However, a previously extrinsically-motivated band may struggle to find the intrinsic motivation again when the struggle toward making the higher band is first removed (Kohn, 1993). Hopefully the 11-12 band would perform at a higher level and younger students would have motivation to stay in band when they become upper-classmen.

However, in the moment, directors can believe in their ensemble to achieve highly and focus more attention on the music at hand without competition getting in the way. Junior high bands typically form by grade level and students can consistently grow by individualized instruction from the instructor despite differing ability levels. Older students can lead by example and serve as role models for younger students to emulate and ask questions. Lower-achieving students have much to gain from hearing and matching their higher-achieving peers, and teachers who still provide challenge to the stronger students can consequently bring all the students up to a higher level (Adler, 1982). Much depends on the preparation and strong individualized instructional strategies of the band director, which can be supported by knowing each student and his or her ability levels and personality well.

### **Give Students Attainable Initiative**

Band instructors can offer numerous student leadership positions to give many students responsibilities that pertain to their strengths and interests and challenge them to grow as

musicians in paths relevant to them. Instead of having only one band president or three drum majors, band directors can create multiple positions including section leaders, assistant section leaders, equipment managers, and more to recognize students and help individuals achieve their potential as learners. Although an interview or audition process may become necessary, student leadership is a “contest” allowing for multiple “winners”, so students do not turn against each other nearly as much as in situations creating one winner and multiple losers. Higher positions increase students’ involvement in band and potentially create increased interest and motivation to lead others to do the same.

Band teachers can hold onto the valuable aspects of the music curriculum such as the preparation of a solo or small chamber ensemble while removing the required, stressful competitive aspect of the process. Instead of requiring students to play a solo at a contest, directors could make the contest an option that students could choose voluntarily. Instead, the final goal of preparing a solo could be a performance day in class for the band or a special evening music concert for parents. By doing so, students remember the value of music apart from the pressure of impressing a judge and play for the listeners and for themselves.

### **Teach Music**

Most importantly, school band programs need to keep promoting the numerous benefits and values of music as its own entity, which will lead to intrinsic motivation in students that contains a depth of interest unmatched by extrinsic motivation alone. Howard (1994) offered a list of five focused instructional goals to engage students in their music education and approach competition professionally: 1) establish positive attitudes toward learning and competing, 2) expose students to as much literature as possible, 3) strive to develop sensitivity and creativity in

each student, 4) perform publicly as often as possible to diminish performance anxiety, and 5) apply previously-learned musical information to new music. Employing these crucial strategies in a band classroom could definitely work to maintain the vast body of music content knowledge and encourage student creativity, expression, and growth.

### **Conclusion**

Band instructors' approaches to competition in music play a significant role in students' attribution of value to music over other external factors. In a world of frequent school budget cuts and increased evaluation of students and teachers, teachers need to maintain support for the aesthetic value of music to continue student participation and enjoyment of band long-term and keep instrumental music alive as an art form in society. Teachers who participate in music contests for explicit goals of musical learning, growth, and performance experience gain more student drive for music than educators who teach minimal amounts of content that simply cut corners to make their bands look good at contest and truly gain little from the experience.

Music educators' beliefs in music as artistic expression can easily become secondary when they overemphasize competition and distract students from the main goal. Even the goal of "teaching the trumpet" can pull away from the deeper goal of "teaching music". If the primary purpose of music education is teaching artistic expression, the majority of class time should be spent on activities related to that purpose. Artistic expression comes forth through musical knowledge and technical skills in combination with creative ideas. Spending the majority of class time preparing for a music contest may rob this goal, because adjudicators have difficulty making reliable assessments of the subjective topic of a student's expression.

Diminishing vast musical expression to a simple number rating devalues what teachers actually



strive to teach. Plus, each person's interpretation will vary, and contests require competitors to cater their interpretation to the version a judge may prefer. Catering to a judge's interests in a competition often decreases risk-taking, but risk-taking and going for one's best lead to higher levels of artistic expression. A strong example of a drawback resulting from this predicament is that the Holst *Suites*, some of the best pieces of wind band literature, rarely appear in performance at state music contests, because directors know that judges know this music well and expect specific things in order to award high ratings. However, band directors may then deprive their students of spending time learning beneficial, high-quality wind band music. Band directors must always remember the overarching motive to maximize students' learning and experience of a large range of music.

### **Author's Experiences**

In this research, I was surprised by the prevalence of support for noncompetitive band programs in comparison to my own experiences. My high school had a very competitive marching band program, requiring at least four contests each year, and students looked forward to these as the highlight of the band. Football games held little importance, because the crowd never watched, and no one evaluated the band. Before a competition, each instrumental section often had a section bonding night and increased excitement to give our best performance. I truly experienced the cooperative aspects within intergroup competition, as described by Howard (1994), because as a section leader, I strived to bring up the bottom players and marchers so the band as a whole could achieve at a higher level. On multiple mornings, I came to rehearsals twenty minutes early to help a struggling freshman student improve at marching. Without competitions, I feared no one would care about achieving at a high level anymore.

Research in this study revealed multiple explanations undermining this elite view of competition. First, cooperative goal structures as I experienced above have shown to increase motivation regardless if there is a reward, such as a contest, or not (Kohn, 1993). Because the competitions were never removed, I had no proof that student participants would decrease in motivation to collaborate without them. If motivation would decrease, however, the phenomenon is explained clearly by Kohn (1993): when previous extrinsic motivators have been in place and are removed, students may no longer have the intrinsic motivation for the subject that initially attracted them. Most significantly, my high school scored among the highest achieving groups at marching band contests, consistently receiving I ratings and landing primarily in the top three places at ranked competitions. Research supports motivation increases through competition for the highest achieving groups, but if the band's comparative ability decreases, so may their motivation.

At the University of Northern Iowa, the Panther Marching Band accepts all interested students and does not engage in any competitions. Although the ensemble may not have the level of technical precision of my high school's competitive band, the Panther Marching Band taught an immensely larger amount of music, performed four different halftime shows, and memorized all the music. Students love participating and have established pride and accomplishment, as well as social bonding within their instrument sections and across the band. Without the pressure of competition, students can choose to perform out of intrinsic desire and minimize reasons to become hostile toward other members.

The wind ensembles at the University of Northern Iowa divide into different groups by ability level but do not participate in any contests throughout the year, which inarguably contributes to the high level of motivation among student players. In addition to the high ability

levels of students, the director intentionally defines music as the creation of something beautiful and as the communication of the composer's ideas to the audience. Students learn the historical context in which the composer wrote the work and try to examine the thoughts and feelings the composer had while writing. They transfer these through musical concepts designed to reach the audience including the key, melody, harmony, texture, dynamics, and phrasing. Musicians try to learn how they can best articulate the emotions and purposes of the composer and accurately portray them to the audience through the performance of the music. Teachers who direct the purpose of music in such a way create an impactful intrinsic value of music with much more power than a simple competitive reward could hope to offer.

### **Imperfection of Research Findings**

Additionally, much of the research supporting competition invites criticism as it reveals negligible differences, multiple factors at work, or short-term outlooks. Austin (1988) found no correlations approaching significance when examining differences in music achievement test scores and performance scores between competitive and noncompetitive groups. Austin (1988) admitted that many of the increases in motivation and achievement seen in the competitive group could have resulted from the solo preparation itself and the increased attention from the teacher. Many studies claiming increased motivation for competitions hold true in the weeks leading up to a contest but do not address the lasting effect of this motivation after the contest. Perhaps the prevalence of college music majors from noncompetitive high school bands could shed light on the long-term effects of competitive motivation.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Suggestions for future research include finding more specific methods to increase intrinsic motivation in music and analyzing long-term motivation levels after contests. When students have participated in competitive band programs for years and the school decides to implement a new, noncompetitive curriculum, teachers need to establish ways to reengage students in music as a worthwhile pursuit. Future researchers could study schools in this transition or analyze student motivations months after a contest ends to see how extrinsic contest motivations sustain or diminish over time. Additionally, in schools containing two band ensembles based on ability level, a researcher could observe the lower band and discover ways to maintain student motivation and achievement without losing people to self-fulfilling prophecy, as they know they do not sit in the top ensemble. A beneficial study would discover how to best separate students into multiple bands while minimizing the negative effects associated with competition.

Cooperation and collaboration promote intrinsic motivation in a band classroom, but an argument exists for the inclusion of external competitions to increase the need for cooperation within a single band. The fact that results are conflicting highlights the subjective nature of competitions and the importance of the directors' attitudes toward them either as unnecessary distractions to avoid or purposeful learning experiences for the sake of expanding musicianship. Whether competing or not, students need the pull to value music, working hard together, and knowing that every player plays a crucial part in making the band whole.

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