CRITERIA, COMPOSITION, AND COMPLIANCE: CONCERT BAND DIRECTORS' PERCEPTION OF CONCERT BAND PUBLISHERS GRADING SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band music publisher difficulty grading systems and the perceptions of the band directors who program concert band music. Because no standard difficulty stratification for concert band music exists among publishers, band directors must rely on personal interpretations of diverse grading systems. This may complicate their programming and curriculum decisions. In the study, two questions were addressed: (a) Does a discrepancy exist between performance difficulty levels assigned to literature through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' perceptions of this music's difficulty level? (b) What criteria do concert band directors use to select music that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level for their concert bands? A sampling of 168 band directors from U.S. schools at the elementary through college levels completed a researcher-designed survey that focused on methods of selecting levelappropriate band literature. They reviewed excerpts from 10 published concert band pieces with a publishers' difficulty level rated from Grade 1 (least difficult) to Grade 6 (most difficult), and offered their perceptions regarding each piece's performance difficulty. Ratings were compared with publishers' assigned difficulty levels. The degree of accord and discord between directors' judgments and publishers' grades were determined and discussed. The results of this study provide a better understanding of the relationship between publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' perceptions of musical difficulty levels. This understanding may assist instrumental music educators with the difficult and important task of band music selection and curriculum planning.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, grandparents and teachers who inspired me to pursue my dreams.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Concert band directors' methods of choosing grade-appropriate repertoire have been a topic of academic research for decades (Apfelstadt, 2000; Brewer, 2018; Del Borgo, 1988; Intravia, 1972; Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985; Reynolds, 2000). Repertoire selection according to level of performance difficulty is a critical task in the identification of effective curricular materials. A concert band selection at an appropriate difficulty level should provide student musicians with beneficial learning and performance opportunities. Finding pieces that meet this goal can be challenging (Forrester, 2017), given the frequent discrepancies between concert band music publishers' grading systems for difficulty levels and band directors' personal judgments of difficulty levels. Musical selections at an inappropriate difficulty level can diminish the efficiency of music education and damage students' motivation to perform (Ralston, 1999).

Background

An essential task of concert band directors is to select music suitable for the ensemble's experience and ability and conform to curricular standards. Choosing appropriate repertoire requires balancing composition difficulty with students' skills. Repertoire that is beneath their skill level could bore them; repertoire that exceeds their skill level could diminish their enjoyment of the music-making process (Saville, 1991). Band directors must develop specialized proficiency for musical selection to the end that band members are sufficiently challenged to improve their skills. These must include compiling music libraries concordant with their music instruction methods and goals

(Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985). Directors must also consider both their own and their students' perceptions of a musical piece's difficulty level. That way, the director and the musicians can agree on the performance of the piece. Agreement is necessary to ensure clarity and consistency in progressing instruction. If one party feels a composition is too difficult and the other does not, then students may be instructed beyond their skill levels or not adequately challenged.

Determining a composition's difficulty level requires careful consideration of compositional elements, including harmony, tempi, keys, modulations, dynamics, articulations, melodic motion, rhythmic motion, technical challenges, transitions, length (duration), and scoring. This is particularly true when choosing music for younger and less experienced students who participate in developing ensembles (Sheldon, 1996). Similarly, music teachers must consider the repertoire's difficulty level when selecting music for their students to learn (McCallum, 2007), as the use of difficulty-graded music in education supports student progress. Teachers can help pupils learn and perform successfully by arranging material in a natural gradation hierarchy that moves from less to greater complexity and challenge (Stephens, 1965).

Before arranging such a progressive sequence of material, criteria for determining what constitutes the various difficulty levels must be defined and subsequently followed. While research on the selection of school concert band repertoire by degree of difficulty would be useful, particularly when it is applied to teachers-in-training, data are woefully scarce. Without education, guidance, or training, teachers resort to ascertain music difficulty through subjective opinion, which provides an uncertain guide for selecting music materials. Reliance on music publishers' arbitrary and disparate grading systems of

concert band music difficulty often produces more questions than answers when determining appropriateness of musical material.

The variability in the subjective grading of band repertoire is evident in the marked discrepancy among graded band music lists. Wareham's (1967) study of three major music associations' lists—the National Band Association Selective Music List, the New York State School Music Association's NYSSMA Manual, and the Virginia Band and Orchestra Directors Association's music lists, resulting in 800 individual compositions in total—found a percentage of total difficulty-level agreement across all three lists of less than 9%.

These findings can be especially problematic when directors try to complete assessments that mention difficulty levels without providing criteria for determining these benchmarks. The *National Core Arts Standards* (SEADAE, 2014) provides adaptable assessment tasks that assist students through each artistic process (Creating, Performing, Responding and Connecting) outlined in the 2014 Music Standards. The standards mention difficulty-level benchmarks for elementary, middle, and high school, but lack specific criteria regarding repertoire difficulty. This often leaves educators potentially confused about what criteria to use for suitable repertoire selection.

Graettinger's (2003) examination of high school band teachers' musical selection criteria and strategies revealed that a group's ability to execute the technical requirements of a piece and develop musical skills in the process was more important than state and national standards for musical selection or musical knowledge acquisition. The highestrated strategy for repertoire selection was listening to promotional recordings (Graettinger, 2003). This may be a state-specific preference; however, as the use of

promotional recordings was deemed the least essential factor among Florida band directors (Hash, 2005).

Ultimately, concert band directors are primarily responsible for selecting repertoire. However, music administrators, supervisors, and music specialists may also have vested interests in the literature choices that reflect the curriculum. While broad concepts of music education goals and objectives often guide curriculum development, the United States does not espouse to a national curriculum nor mandated curricular contents (Colwell, Hewitt & Fonder, 2017). Curricula tend to reflect national goals and outcomes guidelines, but the path to achievement is mostly relegated to the states, school districts, and teachers, who are given the freedom to evaluate, select, and use materials they deem appropriate for curricular inclusion (Colwell et al., 2017). They are not forced by state or national standards, committees, or officials to make such decisions. Therefore, the development of a progressive course of study is largely dependent upon the choice of repertoire, which then may determine the music curriculum's success (Intravia, 1972). Repertoire chosen according to a school concert band's level of musical mastery nurtures the students' musical development and gives them a sense of accomplishment during study and after performance. The task of proper repertoire choice can be daunting for music educators, as repertoire influences their students' musical development (Forrester, 2017) by reflecting their present level of musical ability while challenging them to progress to the next level.

House (1965) suggested that the chosen repertoire should become the student's music classroom textbook, as the framework for their skill development and ensemble

performance ability. De Young (1977) agreed: "The curriculum must evolve around the music, the quality and selection of which are among the most critical decisions" (p. 26). For Grant (1993), selecting music is so essential to music education that choosing inappropriate literature not only mars teachers' reputations but also adversely affects the profession by yielding poor performances.

Reynolds (2000) introduced several strategies to guide music teachers when they select repertoire. For one, their annual selection must determine how appropriate chosen works are for students' educational goals. The author also urged creating personal difficulty leveled repertoire lists, networking with friends and colleagues, using published state/provincial repertoire lists, and researching concert band music and music education websites. In assessing a piece's appropriateness, Reynolds (2000) urged teachers to consider its educational value and required skill level. Similarly, Hopkins (2013) advocated the use of "reality check questions" to identify whether students are musically mature enough to learn a particular piece and perform the complete selected repertoire. Such questions are essential for evaluating the appropriateness of music pieces.

Music teachers should continually consider the above strategies through the repertoire selection process (Reynolds, 2000). They tend to choose repertoire that pertains to their instruction methods (Volk, 2007) and helps students nurture their musical knowledge (Reynolds, 2000). This is because repertoire assists their comprehension of musical concepts that correlate to performance techniques as well as music theory and history. Repertoire is also an avenue "through which students begin the development of discriminatory skills with regard to qualitative elements in music, which in turn leads to greater aesthetic awareness and sensitivity" (Forbes, 2001, p. 102). These

tenets reinforce the essential nature of choosing level-appropriate repertoire (Apfelstadt, 2000; Forrester, 2017; Volk, 2007).

The repertoire selection process usually denotes band directors' conducting abilities, musical priorities, familiarity with musical literature (Forrester, 2017; Hayward, 2004), and personal musical values while guiding the students' musical education process (Sheldon, 1996). Apfelstadt (2000) also noted the importance of repertoire selection:

The selection of repertoire is the single most important task that music educators face before entering the classroom or rehearsal room. Through the repertoire we choose, we not only teach curricular content to our students, but we also convey our philosophy in terms of what we believe students need to learn to achieve musical growth. (p. 15)

The choice of fitting repertoire is key to shaping students' musical tastes (Lamb, 2006), primarily because it enables them to associate their school ensemble's academic music with the world beyond the school (Weller, 2014). These considerations have led most music teachers to deem repertoire selection one of their most challenging (Bauer, 1996; Forrester, 2017; Hayward, 2004) and time-consuming tasks (Hayward, 2004).

The copious amounts of published musical material for the wind band renders repertoire selection challenging and perhaps even overwhelming to instrumental music educators when crucial musical selection decisions must be made (Byo, 1988). Further complicating this process is the incompatibility of a musical piece's intended purpose with a teacher's goals, particularly when "many of the available selections are arrangements of music originally written for other mediums" (Sheldon, 1996, p. 6). Lack of music instruction experience can also hamper repertoire selection, as novice teachers often rely too heavily on publishers' lists. They often default to purchasing the most recently published selections from repertoires studied in or recommended by college music methods courses or collegiate ensembles (Rosene, 2004). Many such lists are so generic they fail to reflect the difficulty level called for in musical choices for a particular group of musicians in a classroom or ensemble (Miller, 2013). Teachers have unlimited access to innumerable online sources (e.g., Google, bandmusicpdf.org, free-scores.com, sheetmusicplus.com, YouTube), but these sources often do not specify difficulty levels or grading standards that teachers utilize to determine grade-level appropriateness.

Correlating Music Selection with Student Ability

In repertoire selection, directors must consider players' strengths and weaknesses. Insofar as most school ensembles are populated with student musicians who represent a span of ability levels, consideration must be given to music that may be too much of a challenge for less-skilled sections in the ensemble. Goldman (1961) argued that selected music ought to challenge the superior players without burdening the less accomplished ones. Thus the director must carefully consider the band's distinctive assets and liabilities. Garofalo (1983) claimed that many directors attempt music that is too technically demanding for their bands. Careful consideration of students' technical proficiency levels, coupled with full scrutiny and definition of the skills necessary to execute a particular piece, would lead to appropriate selections for the band's competence level. Other authors (House, 1965; Intravia, 1972) have cited the need to match the music to each band's strengths and weaknesses.

If the chosen music does not match the band's strengths, then a situation arises that resembles Goldwin J. Emerson's (1979) egalitarian paradox:

One of the paradoxes of our society is that the more we treat people equally, the more we increase their inequality. Conversely, if we want people to end up with equal status, equal positions, and equal achievements, we must treat them in an unequal manner. (p. 53)

When all students receive equal treatment, inequality increases. Conversely, to achieve equal outcomes among the players, teachers must treat them unequally. Arlin (1984) called this problem the "Robin Hood" approach, taking teaching time from the academically rich and giving it to the academically poor. If the music does not appropriately match the band's assets and liabilities, then teachers risk an outcome of frustration, stagnation, and loss of motivation among some of their students.

Publisher Grading Practices

A substantial amount of musical material is acquired through music publishers. Therefore, a need exists to look at publishers' systems. Purportedly as a service to educators who would purchase materials, several concert band music publishers post their grading systems on their websites and promotional materials. Hagg (1986) surveyed five publishers to understand the different philosophies concerning beginning and developing band music grading. Hagg (1986) noted that the lack of an industry-wide grading standard causes repertoire selection confusion, and graded music catalogs are not always helpful. Ambiguity and discrepancies are abundant; what one publisher considers elementary literature, for instance, another might deem intermediate level. The problem is further compounded when these same pieces appear on selective music lists under different grades (Hagg, 1986).

Hagg (1986) discovered that publishers use two general approaches to grade young band music: curriculum-based grading and criterion-based grading. Curriculumbased grading correlates to a method book's concepts and sections. In criterion-based grading, composers write within the pre-defined parameters of range, rhythm, key, tempi, and appropriate style for each difficulty level. These parameters are the foundation of the development of most methods books, such as in the case of Saville (1991), who used a computer-assisted program to select band music, which was relative to individual instrument difficulty ratings. This work exemplifies criterion-based grading in music, and alignment can exist between the use of criterion-based grading and method books even if curriculum-based grading is designed to address concepts specifically with these books.

A third publisher approach is a standards-based based model that grew out of the 1994 National Standards for Music Education. Method books such as *Essential Elements for Band* (2015), *Measures of Success* (2010), and *Sound Innovations* (2010) utilize a standards-based model, and *Sound Innovations* (2010) mentions explicitly this on the back cover. Additionally, *Accent on Achievement* (1997) and *Essential Elements for Band* (2015) method books reinforce essential concepts through original concert band compositions and arrangements, while allowing students to experience full band works.

The result of the three aforementioned publisher approaches to grading music is to grade and label a piece according to its technical content. Most publishers categorize concert band literature using global rating systems, which classify compositions similar to the National Band Association's Grade Level Definitions (Table 1).

Table 1

National Band Association's Grade Level Definitions (National Band Association, 2019)

Grade Level	Definition
1	Quality works suitable for performance by good grade school and developing junior high school bands
2	Quality works suitable for performance by advanced grade school and good junior high school bands
3	Quality works suitable for performance by outstanding junior high school and good high school bands
4	Quality works suitable for performance by advanced junior high school bands and high school band and appropriate for programming by college, university, and professional band organizations
5	Quality works suitable for performance by highly advanced high school bands and outstanding college, university, and professional band organizations
6	Quality works suitable for band and wind ensemble representing the most difficult works in the repertoire, which are suitable for performance by the finest college, university, and professional band organizations, and in some cases the finest high school bands

The websites of many concert band music publishers and sheet music retailers contain information about their guidelines for grading music according to difficulty level. An assessment of these sites shows the conundrum music educators face when using the sites to inform their repertoire selection decisions. The sites present an extensive diversification of grading scales that are tremendously inconsistent with one another. These companies vary in their criteria for determining the difficulty level of music they market to educators. Such variances can confuse music educators regarding the selection

of appropriate music for their ensembles based on their level of craftsmanship and usefulness in teaching musical concepts to their students (Sheldon, 2000).

Difficulty-level discrepancies also exist among repertoire assessment lists prescribed or required by district and all-state music festivals (Beckwith, 2018; Stevenson, 2003), which are often created by subcommittees of various state music educators' associations. These compilations can streamline band directors' work when selecting music and may assuage the frustration of rummaging through a plethora of possible selections. However, the lack of accordance on music grading standards among the lists may result in directors' confusion about what is best for their ensembles to play according to the players' competency levels. For instance, some states, including Alabama and Ohio, categorize the literature by difficulty levels 1-7 (four classes for high school and three classes for middle school); others, such as Arkansas, California, and Florida, designate pieces according to difficulty levels 1-6. Furthermore, Idaho, Louisiana, Oregon, and Texas use five levels, while Wisconsin has four and Minnesota has three (Stevenson, 2003). If a musical selection appears on each of these lists, it may be categorized differently on each, making any comparison of difficulty level problematic. Beckwith (2018) and Stevenson (2003) examined the disparity in concert band difficulty-level assignment of pieces on prescribed repertoire lists. To illustrate the lack of consistent difficulty-level standards among educators, state organizations, and publishers, consider the example of Frank Ticheli's arrangement of "Amazing Grace" (Ticheli, 1994), which was ranked as a level 4 (of 6) on the Florida Bandmasters Association List (Florida Bandmasters Association, 2017), level 3 (of 5) on the Texas University Interscholastic League Prescribed Music List (2019), level 2 (of 3) on the

Indiana State School Music Association (Middleton, 2017) High School list, and level 1 (of 5) on the Indiana State School Music Association (Middleton, 2017) Junior High/Middle School/Elementary list.

Problem Statement

Grade-appropriate repertoire selection is an essential responsibility of concert band directors (Apfelstadt, 2000; Del Borgo, 1988; Forrester, 2017; Intravia, 1972; Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985; Reynolds, 2000). Inappropriate selections can limit the efficacy of music instruction, and lead to confusion, discouragement, and impaired musical development for students (Ralston, 1999). Nevertheless, directors experience challenges in identifying level-appropriate pieces for their bands because of the inconsistencies among evaluation criteria of states and instrumental music publishers (Beckwith, 2018; Hagg, 1986; Miller, 2013; Stevenson, 2003). This struggle is more pronounced in inexperienced teachers and directors, who may lack confidence in their ability to select pieces (Forrester, 2017) or rely too heavily on previously published lists of selections (Rosene, 2004). Researchers have focused on identifying high-quality pieces (Gilbert, 1993; Ostling, 1978; Towner, 2011) or assessing the pedagogical values of music educators (Brewer, 2018; Forrester, 2017).

Very little research examines explicitly how music teachers reconcile the disparate difficulty ratings of individual pieces. This paucity of research, however, is vital to proper repertoire selection and should be studied further to give us a complete view of the selection process.

In three influential studies (Gilbert, 1993; Ostling, 1978; Towner, 2011), researchers identified high-quality repertoire for wind and percussion ensemble, but none

emphasized criteria for difficulty-level-appropriate music or even mentioned how those criteria differ among difficulty levels. This study was designed to uncover additional information that further underscores the existence of a discrepancy between publisher grading guidelines, band directors' perceptions of concert band difficulty levels, and the principles for selecting difficulty-level-appropriate repertoire.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to identify agreement and disagreement among band directors regarding their perceptions of difficulty level ratings of published concert band repertoire.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

 Does a discrepancy exist between performance difficulty levels assigned through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' personal perceptions of this music's difficulty level?

H_o1: No statistically significant discrepancy exists between the difficulty levels of music publishers and concert band directors' perception of music difficulty.
H_a1: There is a statistically significant discrepancy between difficulty levels used by music publishers and concert band directors' perception of music difficulty.

2. What criteria do instrumental concert band use to select level-appropriate music for their ensembles that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level?

Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in a combination of flow theory and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Flow theory presented a systematic approach to the study of intrinsic motivation. It focuses on the development of flow states, which are periods of time characterized by perceived temporal distortions (generally described as time moving faster), a merging of action and awareness, a heightened internal locus of control, a loss of reflective self-consciousness, and intense, focused concentration. This state can lead to intrinsic rewards such as complete absorption in an activity, which may motivate an individual to continue engaging in a task (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

A flow state can develop only in the face of challenges or opportunities that stretch, but do not overmatch, an individual's skills, provide clear proximal goals, and allow for immediate feedback about progress. A flow state is fragile, however. It thus requires a dynamic equilibrium that experiences a disruption if the challenge ceases to stretch an individual's skill appropriately, becoming either too easy or too difficult (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

ZPD focuses on the difference between natural skill development within an individual and the potential for skill development occurring through the learning process (Levykh, 2008). It is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86; Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). In simpler terms, the ZPD is the gap between what a learner cannot do even if guided or even when collaborating with others and what he/she can do independently (Sarker, 2019). It can be described as the optimal area of learning where all educators want their students to reside because it is where the instruction is most beneficial for the student (Audley, 2018).

Instructional scaffolding, or "Vygotsky scaffolding," helps students learn by working with a teacher or a more advanced student to achieve their learning goals. Through this method, students gain a better understanding of their current capabilities and mental processes and develop more robust skills faster (Levykh, 2008). Instructional scaffolding is a useful complement to flow theory because it demonstrates the music teacher's role in generating flow states. A student is unlikely to experience a flow state while aided by a music teacher. However, in working to develop skills within the ZPD, a music teacher may increase the likelihood of achieving flow states in the future. This is because ZPD's social construct establishes a framework for students to achieve a flow state through outside guidance of their internal development.

The ZPD theory eases identification of what learners can do on their own and with scaffolding, which refers to the assistance they receive from more knowledgeable people. By acknowledging this disparity, educators can help students achieve more than what they could accomplish independently. Once the students have mastered a task, the scaffolding can be removed, setting up students to complete the task independently (Audley, 2018). Proper learning materials are necessary to scaffold learners meaningfully. Also, critical assessment of learners must be entirely accurate to their levels, neither too easy nor too complicated for them to achieve optimal learning (Sarker, 2019).

As students learn new repertoire following the ZPD method, they are expected to grasp the knowledge and solve the problems they encounter independently after receiving adequate guidance from their music teachers. Teachers must accurately assess the levels of challenges they present to their students and consider how these tasks could stimulate

and improve their students' skills (Chen, 2018). Teachers are expected to identify and use repertoire that can stretch students' abilities in the various domains of learning without bringing them to a point where they experience frustration and begin to lose interest (Hopkins, 2013). The theory of ZPD framed this study because the theory emphasizes correctly organized teaching for the student's intellectual development.

When students rehearse in a large ensemble, they solve problems under the teacher's guidance and in collaboration with peers. This alliance allows for a higher level of musical achievement than is possible when working alone or without educator feedback (Hopkins, 2013). By focusing on the mastery of technical skills or musical concepts, a music teacher can successfully bring students into the ZPD (Hopkins, 2013). Music teachers must choose repertoire that challenges students with opportunities for them to reach their ZPD at the beginning of the rehearsal cycle (Hopkins, 2013). This may lead to the optimal experience of flow during the performance (Hopkins, 2013).

Scholars have already examined flow theory within the context of instrumental music classrooms (Clementson, 2018), which validated its application in the current study. While Clementson focused on student experiences, this research applied to the current study because it analyzed factors that give rise to flow states. Ultimately, Clementson (2018) determined that flow is highly individualized, not reliant on the self-perceived ratings of student skill and repertoire challenge. Thus, flow theory may be more appropriate when discussing the goals of an educator than when focusing specifically on the perceptions of students, especially younger ones.

Method of the Study

Concert Band Directors (N = 168) were recruited from American schools at elementary through college levels. This sample was randomly generated from respondents to an advertisement in public state concert band association newsgroups, online instrumental music forums, and instrumental music social media forums. Only individuals with music educator or administrator licenses were eligible for the study.

Participants completed a survey comprising Likert-scale, checkbox, and openended questions. It thereby collected information on participants' demographics (Section 1), level perceptions and repertoire selection methodology (Section 2), and difficultylevel perception of selected excerpts (Section 3). Information in Section 2 was derived by finding the mode of the publishers with the most pieces on the National Band Association Selective Music List (2019) and the Texas University Interscholastic League Prescribed Music List (2019). A random sampling of excerpts from 10 concert band pieces from the three most represented publishers with detailed grading criteria was selected.

Section 3 presented excerpts from 10 previously publisher-graded pieces, which included original band compositions, transcriptions, and arrangements. The participants viewed these excerpts and assigned them a difficulty level from Grade 1 (least) to Grade 6 (most). The excerpts and difficulty guidelines were derived from publishers whose music most frequently appeared on the National Band Association Selective Music List (2019) and the Texas University Interscholastic League Prescribed Music List (2019). Excerpts were limited to music published during the past 25 years (1994–2019) to ensure that composition and orchestration techniques matched current education outcomes.

The collected data were analyzed to determine each piece's mean and standard deviation of ratings. These were compared to the publisher ratings to determine the assessment deviation's size. The participants' responses to open-ended questions were analyzed for categorical similarities, which enabled data construction and coding. The data were then analyzed in the same manner as noted for the directly quantitative data.

Assumptions

The derived sample was assumed to represent the national population. If the sample contained a higher proportion of individuals with more experience than the population average, this could have skewed the results. Demographic factors were assumed not to affect participant responses significantly. Finally, the participants presumably had sufficient confidence to allow them to rate the difficulty of excerpted pieces adequately, and discrepancies between participant ratings and publisher ratings were presumed to be due to broad trends rather than state- or region-specific trends.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included only the discrepancies between publisher- and participant-assessed difficulty levels of excerpted pieces. Topics not explored were pedagogical, philosophical, or esthetic concerns about repertoire; discrepancies between participant assessments and state list assessments; students' evaluations about perceived difficulties; or the effects of any of the selected excerpts on musical skill development.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was its focus on the potential discrepancy between participant and publisher assessments of a piece's difficulty level. By not including information on state list-provided assessments, the study could not determine whether

state ratings affected either participant or publisher assessments. Additionally, the use of a national sample could not pinpoint any state or region-specific trends in difficulty assessment. For instance, participant assessments may have been most divided from publisher assessments in areas where the state assessment was also significantly divided from publisher assessments. Those potential interactions were unidentifiable. All of these limitations were deemed acceptable for the current study based on its exploratory nature.

Concert band music publishers sometimes grade music on half-levels (e.g., 1.5, 2.5, 3.5). This study used only whole levels to help participants make clear distinctions between one level and the next, to ameliorate potential confusion, and to require participants to determine an exact difficulty level within the survey. This practice mirrored Likert-type scale strategies that force choices between whole numbers. Research is lacking in this area, and this study provided a foundation for future studies that can examine these methods of distinguishing among difficulty levels.

Finally, the selection of difficulty assessment excerpts was limited to only 10 difficulty assessment excerpts from four concert band publishers were selected. The use of a whole number scale forced a generalization of difficulty level across all written pieces rated by the instrumental music publishers from a small selection of items.

This study sought to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band publisher difficulty grading systems and the perceptions of the band directors who program this music. While educators have clearly understood specific terminology discussed within the subsequent chapters, the review of scholarly literature and methodology required a mutual vocabulary to be established. For this study, it was determined that a common understanding of the following terms was useful.

Definitions

Concert band directors are individuals in charge of selecting repertoire for students and educating them regarding music (Forrester, 2017).

Ensembles are concert bands that can include a variety of instruments, depending on the genre (Forrester, 2017).

Flow is the perceived state of being completely absorbed in an activity (Nakamura & Csikszenmihalyi, 2009).

Difficulty-level is a numerical designator that identifies the difficulty of a piece relative to other pieces as rated by an organization (Ralston, 1999).

Difficulty-level appropriate signifies that the numerical designator of difficulty for a piece of music matches a student's assessed skill level (Ralston, 1999).

Music lists are selections of pieces provided by an organization; directors can use these lists to generate a repertoire (Stevenson, 2003).

Piece describes an individual work for an ensemble to perform (Forrester, 2017).

Publisher describes a private organization that owns the copyrights to pieces of

music and provides them for sale to ensembles (Hash, 2005).

Repertoire is the identified collection of musical pieces for ensembles to perform (Forrester, 2017).

Repertoire selection methodology is the identified process for selecting an ensemble's repertoire (Forrester, 2017).

Zone of proximal development (ZPD) defines "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of

potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 86).

Significance

This study is significant in its examination of the dearth of recent information on repertoire difficulty assessments. In preparing for this study, the search for a significant amount of recent research that addressed the issue of repertoire selection for students was challenging. Most of the found literature focused on issues related mainly to the quality of literature, but also related to teacher confidence, aesthetic and philosophical concerns, and increasing diversity for composers. No recent study explicitly addressing the process of evaluating a specific piece's difficulty level was available. Nor did any of the found studies address the issue of discrepant ratings among various assessors. This study partially remedies these issues while also providing a foundation for future studies.

Furthermore, by identifying discrepancies in publisher and participant difficulty assessments, this study provides useful information to states, publishers, and teachers on the reliability of difficulty ratings. This information may also reduce discrepancies between state and publisher lists and among the music lists of different publishers. The goal is to contribute to a more consistent national system for rating the difficulty-level appropriateness of specific pieces of music.

Summary

Repertoire selection, a principal responsibility of music educators, is hard to adequately accomplish (Apfelstadt, 2000; Forrester, 2017; Volk, 2007) because the wide variety of discrepant rating systems causes individual pieces to receive inconsistent ratings (Hagg, 1986; Miller, 2013; Sheldon, 2000; Stevenson, 2003). This may confuse

educators about the difficulty-level appropriateness of particular musical pieces for their classes or ensembles (Forrester, 2017; Rosene, 2004). The current study aimed to (a) verify the existence of discrepancies between the assessments of music by publishers and music educators, (b) analyze the magnitude of these discrepancies, and (c) identify potential causes of these discrepancies. This threefold approach may help publishers and educators to understand better and resolve the issues that lead to these discrepancies.

Chapter 2 includes an in-depth discussion of the available research on repertoire selection and the discrepancy among the difficulty ratings provided by various assessors.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter's literature review outlines the importance of repertoire selection, curricular planning and resulting musical learning, the various systems of rating and assessing concert band literature, and music educators' differing approaches to difficultylevel-appropriate repertoire selection for their ensembles.

Concert band directors' methods of grade-appropriate repertoire selection have been prevalent in academic research (Atchison, 2015; Hirokawa, 2015; Hopkins, 2013; Kirchhoff, 2010; McCrann, 2016). The selection process is often difficult (Atchison, 2015; Kirchhoff, 2010), given the plethora of available music and difficulty-level assessment criteria. Furthermore, repertoire selection is not only about choosing the pieces for the ensembles to play. It is primarily about defining a curriculum for students' overall music education (Kirchhoff, 2010). The repertoire is thus the backbone of the students' curriculum, and students who perform literature appropriate to their skill levels are more likely to continue studying music (Atchison, 2015).

Furthermore, music curriculum planning is one of the least understood areas for music directors new to the profession (Atchison, 2015), due in part to the paucity of literature on curricular planning. To properly plan a curriculum, directors must understand what type and difficulty level of repertoire should be taught and learned to best nurture their students' musical skills. They must also know what kind of music comprises effective, enjoyable learning experiences for their students. Previous research

has evaluated band repertoire to distinguish high-quality from low-quality musical selections (Chandler, 2014). Other research has examined perceptions of instrumental music educators toward repertoire selection and music programming (Forrester, 2017).

Further research concerned the genre, style, and structure of music to teach students so they may profit the most from their music education, versus the types of music that educational institutions value and the difficulty-level appropriateness of the pieces selected according to those types (Fautley & Daubney, 2019). However, no recent studies explore how concert band directors' perceptions of music difficulty differ from publishers' grading systems, or how this influences directors' repertoire selection.

Ability-Appropriate Pedagogy and Effective Student Learning

Effective student learning in any discipline requires instructors with a complex set of skills, including deliberately choosing teaching content, mastering it, and assuming a professional identity (Abramo, 2016; Kovalev et al., 2016). In a study of how teachers influence the student attitudes and behaviors that are associated with student success in general education classes, Blazar and Kraft (2017) found that teachers significantly affect their students' self-reported happiness and academic self-efficacy. More specifically, the methods teachers used to teach and interact with students were found to influence the students' satisfaction with their progress and confidence in their ability to achieve their academic goals and required objectives.

The authors also found that teachers' classroom organization and emotional support for students positively related to students' cooperative behavior and classroom expectation fulfillment (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). They retained knowledge and engaged with the curriculum more when their learning styles were well matched with their

teachers' approach to classroom instruction (Awla, 2014). For example, a visual learner learned better when information was presented visually. When teachers and students had congruent learning styles, higher scores, and better outcomes resulted (Awla, 2014).

The promotion of positive student behavior and attitudes and the development of their vocational skills are equally important to students' long-term success. Educators must expand their skills to ensure that these requirements are met (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Educators are thus expected to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate the different learning needs of their students, as well as to ensure that their learning processes are effective, enjoyable, and more accelerated according to students' individual abilities and levels of musical development (Awla, 2014).

To accomplish this, educators must align curriculum and course design, instructional approaches, and student assignments and activities in a holistic curriculum framework (Hutchings, 2016). A lack of alignment among different elements of the curriculum decreases students' ability to retain the knowledge they gained, as each new element of the curriculum should reinforce aspects of what was recently learned. Kearney and Garfield (2019) highlighted the importance of alignment of curriculum and course design, instructional approaches, and assignments, as teachers' abilities to assess student readiness can directly affect students' educational outcomes. In the selection of the repertoire used within a given curriculum, elements and skills associated with individual songs (i.e., articulation, intonation, phrasing and dynamics, rhythmic precision, and tone quality) should build upon one another, and in most cases, difficulty level should gradually increase.

The selection of appropriate instructional materials strongly affects student learning processes, especially in such fundamental educational areas as reading, mathematics, and science (Steiner, 2018). Toyosi (2018) investigated how teaching methods and instructional materials affected learning in secondary school physical education. The author found that the selection of materials appropriate to their learning levels can stimulate students to learn by acknowledging their present learning levels and enabling them to progress to higher levels. Mochere (2016) similarly stated that poorly chosen instructional materials, as well as inadequate resources, can lead to poor student performance in music and below-average examination performances. Educators must, therefore, align their music selections with academic achievement goals and use those selections effectively in the classroom (Steiner, 2018).

Importance of Repertoire in Music Pedagogy

In selecting repertoire, concert band directors must familiarize themselves with various grading systems, understand the musical demands of a piece of repertoire, and balance the technical and aesthetic goals of music education (Chen, 2018). The challenge of selecting repertoire lies in not only choosing suitable musical pieces, but also eliminating those that would not contribute to building core skills and knowledge (Forrester, 2017). More than 1,000 new band music titles enter the marketplace yearly, and music directors' and educators' choices often determine which titles remain in the marketplace (Kirchhoff, 2010) based on their selection and purchase frequency.

Hopkins (2013) stated that different music educators might select the same piece for entirely different reasons. These may include the instruction of specific technical

skills such as articulation, intonation, phrasing and dynamics, rhythmic precision, and tone quality.

Many directors program a diverse selection of pieces representing various historical periods, tempos, and eclectic styles (Hopkins, 2013). Abramo (2016) stressed that the selection of appropriate repertoire and the structuring of effective and efficient pace and sequences for ensemble rehearsals are core strategies for effective instrumental music pedagogy. Directors exposing their students to a wide variety of musical styles may broaden their education and better develop their musical performance versatility. Music educators might also program pieces to teach students about a particular composer, musical genre, style, world culture, or historical period (Hopkins, 2013). A well-varied repertoire can also engage students in free or structured improvisation. This nurtures their thinking about the very nature of music by broadening their musical exposure, performance versatility, and ability to compare and contrast various musical styles (Hopkins, 2013).

Repertoire selection is also about commitment, exposure, and risk, particularly if the director's value system conflicts with students', parents', and administrators' visions for a music education program (Kirchhoff, 2010). The teacher's repertoire choices can thus communicate his or her philosophical and aesthetic values to the students and their parents (Forrester, 2017).

Ensemble repertoire can be a medium for teaching musical concepts and reinforcing aspects of other areas of musical study to foster students' overall musical development (Forrester, 2017). For concert bands, although no definitive core repertoire of musical works for bands exists, there seems to be a desire to quantify and qualify
extant literature by those in the profession. As a result, a number of band repertoire lists have emerged over the years. The most influential sources of repertoire for young bands are contest music lists published by state music organizations (Harris & Walls, 1996). These lists are influential because they are the most widely used and often represent young bands' first introductions into extensive practice and training (Harris & Walls, 1996). The first formalized U.S. national band competition occurred in 1923 (Chandler, 2014). As band competitions continued to grow in popularity in the early 20th century, band directors began to select repertoire they believed would give their ensemble the best chance to win since winning was the objective (Chandler, 2014). Therefore, these pieces became widely regarded as the repertoire of choice for many other bands as well. This, however, provoked a debate on whether band directors should select their repertoire to put sound educational content into it, or merely to improve the probability of winning (Chandler, 2014). This information is important because it reflects contributions to composition selection and ways in which band members and directors might have differing perceptions of difficulty.

Ostling (1978), Towner (2011), and Gilbert (1993) all provided evidence that specific compositions are worth consideration due to their degree of serious artistic merit, acceptance, and skill. Accordingly, various individuals, state and professional organizations, and committees have developed lists of music appearing to be of high quality. However, they did so with specific audiences in mind; hence, many of these lists lacked quality-grading criteria (Wiggins, 2013). Sheldon (2000), however, affirmed, "Effective music education experiences depend on the quality of musical materials used to facilitate instruction" (p. 10). In Sheldon's (2000) study, experienced educators ranked

the quality of three unfamiliar band scores, finding that the key element that most focused on in their ranking was melodic quality. Interestingly, undergraduates in the study used composer information rather than musical information when ranking the quality of instrumental works. Several studies have compared and contrasted experienced and inexperienced band music teachers' perceptions of the musical quality of particular instrumental works, yielding results similar to those of Sheldon's (2000) study (Bauer, 1996; DeCarbo, 1982; Fiese, 1991).

Concert Band Literature Grading Systems

The specific features and factors that define musical difficulty, particularly within the educational setting, still elude universal consensus, as shown by the scant agreement in the literature on the qualitative judgments people assign to particular pieces of music (McCrann, 2016). The historical origins of recommended or required music lists published by professional music education and state-level organizations in the U.S. began with *A Survey of Music Material for Bands*, developed for national band contests in the 1920s (Brewer, 2018).

According to McCrann (2016), the notion of a core band repertoire of highquality music is primarily rooted in the aesthetic philosophies of particular band movement leaders. Prominent band conductors of the 1920s included Patrick Gilmore, Arthur Pryor, Harold Bachman, Edwin Franko Goldman, and John Philip Sousa. The overreliance on philosophies of historic band figures can consequentially mean emergent and innovative music styles and selections are devalued for not conforming.

McCrann (2016) noted, however, the small but growing movement that continues to challenge this status quo. Music education philosophies emerging today, are now

challenging traditional criteria for judging high-quality repertoire (McCrann, 2016). Philosophies derived partially from Randall Everett Allsup and Cathy Benedict's (2003, 2007; Allsup & Benedict, 2008) call for student input into the music classroom as opposed to leaving repertoire selection entirely to the jurisdiction of the band director. David Elliott's (1995) praxial principles and Estelle Jorgensen's (1997) dialectical viewpoints challenge the common criteria for judging repertoire's difficulty level and musical quality. However, the music education philosophy of selecting repertoire based on its aesthetic quality remains a significant influence on the formation of today's school band. This influence is evident in Garofalo's (2000) *Blueprint for Band*, a text commonly used in instrumental music education for its emphasis on the structural characteristics of band music as the source of aesthetic music education philosophy.

McCrann (2016) also stated that concert band literature grading systems for defining a core band music repertoire continue to grow for both practical and idealistic reasons. The rise of American military bands in the 19th and 20th centuries fostered the growth of bands within American schools. School bands then rose to prominence during World War I and gained widespread support for patriotic purposes. After World War I, musically trained military band veterans became music directors in schools, prompting an increase in school concert bands and a need to measure student and teacher progress (Brewer, 2018; Whitehill, 1969). Bands evolved from mere community, social, and entertainment organizations to educational institution affiliates, thereby creating the challenge of repertoire decision-making for educational value (Brewer, 2018). Before band music education could be considered academic, the course content and the literature needed systematic organization as worthy study material (McCrann, 2016). In response to

the need to develop a core repertoire, various standards have emerged to assess what is or is not "good" music for school bands (McCrann, 2016).

Marked disagreement among graded band music lists demonstrates variability in the results of subjective grading. By their nature, the global rating systems are fraught with subjective judgments. Wareham's (1967) aforementioned study of three major music lists containing 800 individual titles, which concluded that the percentage of total agreement across all three lists was less than 9%, increases in significance regarding the dilemma of selecting music from lists. These lists are so extensive that they defy any one director's attempts to learn the entire repertoire (Prescott & Chidester, 1938), as doing so would take so much time out of music instruction and conducting. It would also confuse and befuddle directors about what pieces are most difficulty-level appropriate for their ensembles, particularly considering the constant addition of new literature that gives directors so many choices it is harder for them to select proper ones from them to match their ensembles' musical development levels.

Current global rating systems do not give band directors accurate difficulty assessments. The use of seminal sources is important for the director, who must rely on music lists for music selections. One such list, while dated, is the *Band Music Guide* (Instrumentalist, 1996), which lists more than 11,000 titles by author, title, publisher. Most selections include a grade of difficulty ranging from Level I to Level VI (Table 2). Table 2

Band Music Guide (The Instrumentalist, 1996)

Grade Level Definition

1 Mainly for the first-year instrumentalist

2	For those beyond the beginning stages
3	For those who have acquired some technique
4	For more advanced instrumentalists
5	Mostly for college players
6	For the skilled professional

Ostling (1978) developed perhaps the most emulated study on the artistic merits of wind band literature. The author surveyed 20 experts and used specific criteria to develop a list of nearly 200 musical pieces those experts deemed to possess serious artistic merit. Gilbert (1993) then applied this methodology, creating a slightly different resulting list of works. Various researchers have applied Ostling's (1978) approach to diverse areas such as particular difficulty level pieces (Rhea, 1999; Thomas, 1998) and specific instrumental skillsets (Baker, 1997; Bellinger, 2002; Honas, 1996). Some studies also focused on essential or core repertoire development, which similarly resulted in a list of works conductors selected through qualitative evaluation (Oliver, 2012).

In Best Music For Young Band: A Selective Guide To The Young Band/Young Wind Ensemble Repertoire ((Dvorak, Schmalz & Taggart, 1986), which is virtually identical to Best Music for High School Band (Dvorak, Grechesky & Ciepluch, 1993), the authors thoroughly discussed the following criteria for defining quality music selection for bands:

(a) The composition must exhibit a high degree of compositional craft. (b) The composition must contain important musical constructs necessary for the development of musicianship (e.g., variety of keys, variety of meters, variety of

harmonic styles, variety of articulations). (c) Compositions must exhibit an orchestration that, within the restrictions associated with a particular grade level, encourage musical independence both of individuals and sections. (p. 10)

Kreines and Hansbrough (2014) recreated the Band Music Handbook (1971) with many updated selections and a new format in their publication, *Music for Concert Band:* A Selective Annotated Guide to Band Literature. The authors sorted existing literature into different grades and categories so directors could discover or rediscover the literature that appears in their book. It covers three subjects: (a) music for concert band, (b) concert program materials, and (c) Kreines and Hansbrough's (2014) selective list of marches. Each subject contains five different categories based on difficulty and equated to a difficulty level: Easy, Medium Easy, Medium, Medium Advanced, and Advanced. Easy pieces (\approx grades 1 and 2) have basic rhythms, limited technique with simple textures, effective doublings, and limited solos. Medium Easy pieces (\approx grade 3) possess more elaborate rhythms, increasing technical facility, expanded ranges, greater technical independence, and more solo and small-choir scoring. Medium pieces (\approx grade 4) contain varied rhythms, expanded technical demands, more complex harmonic and contrapuntal content, metric variety, greater range of keys, and more musical and scoring subtleties. Medium Advanced pieces (\approx grade 5) have more substantial musical and technical requirements, mature tonal, rhythmic, and stylistic concepts, and soloistic capabilities. Advanced pieces (\approx grade 6) comprise fully developed musical and technical ranges, complex rhythms and meters, intricacies of articulations, a full dynamic spectrum, and full solo and section capability (Kreines & Hansbrough, 2014). The authors considered

grading to be problematic, particularly when a definite disparity between musical and technical difficulties existed.

Music educator and composer Douglas Akey collaborated with the Arizona Band and Orchestra Director's Association (ABODA) to create a dual grading assessment when determining difficulty levels of pieces. In addition to technical considerations such as key, tempo, rhythmic difficulty, and the like. Akey and ABODA (2010) also assessed musical difficulty, another conundrum for directors when choosing difficulty-level music selections. Grading was done on a numerical scale from 1 (least difficult) to 6 (most difficult). Easier pieces on the list included John Kinyon's arrangement of Johannes Brahms' Theme from Symphony No. 1, rated 1 for technical difficulty and 2 for musical level as "a superb way for the youngest of bands to really grapple for the first time with legato style, both from an articulation and air management standpoint" (Akey & ABODA, 2010, p. 3). More challenging compositions included Ralph Vaughan Williams' Folk Song Suite, rated 4 for technical difficulty and 6 for musical level as a "great British band classic [that] can be played by an accomplished young band. It might be advisable to take one movement each year, rather than trying to tackle the whole thing at once" (Akey & ABODA, 2010).

A premier graded music list, the "Selective Music List," was compiled in 1926 for the Music Supervisors' National Conference (Saville, 1991). Compilers Russell V. Morgan and Harry F. Clarke also provided a classification system to rate each piece by grade of difficulty and type of composition, based on a four-level format (Table 3).

Table 3

Selective Music List Grading Criteria (Saville, 1991)

Grade	Criteria
Ι	Easy material for beginning bands of all school ages.
II	Material of intermediate difficulty for junior and senior high school bands having at least one year of thorough training.
III	Advanced material suitable for well-organized Senior High School Bands.
IV	Material for the highest type of school concert bands.

In 1939, the grading system changed to the following five-level format (Table 4).

Table 4

Selective Music List Grading Criteria, Revised (Saville, 1991)

Grade	Criteria
Ι	Extremely simplecould be handled by a good, elementary school band or backward Junior High organization
II	Easy material for beginning bands of all school ages.
III	Material of intermediate difficulty, for junior and senior high school bands having at least one year of thorough training
IV	Advanced material, for well-organized senior high school bands.
V	These numbers are of advanced difficulty and are of professional-grade, hence are suitable only for the highest type of school concert band.

In 1946, the grading system was changed to a six-level format, ranging from Grade I, very easy, to Grade VI, very difficult, without descriptions or annotations (Saville, 1991).

Saville (1991) suggested that, because more selections were added, a further sophisticated system was necessary to categorize each selection of music subjectively.

The National Band Association, the world's largest professional organization for bands, was founded in 1960 to promote bands' musical and educational significance and set a high standard of band music excellence. In 1971, the National Band Association began to publish the Selective Music Lists (Saville, 1991). The current National Band Association Selective Music List (2019) has selections ranging from Grade 1, the easiest, to Grade 6, the hardest. Grades are given only in whole numbers, and the National Band Association periodically updates this list (see Table 1).

Dvorak, Schmalz, and Taggart (1986) discussed their criteria for assigning a grade to a particular piece of music. The book focuses entirely on Grades 1, 2, and 3, of a six-level grade system. A Grade 1 piece contains basic rhythms, restricted ranges, undeveloped technique, homophonic texture, rhythmic uniformity throughout the band, ample doubling, and much full *tutti* and half scoring. A Grade 2 work contains intermediate rhythms with some syncopation, duplet/triplet rhythms, expanding ranges, fluent technique, changing meters, some independence of parts, and mature musical constructs. A Grade 3 selection contains challenging rhythms with free use of syncopation, section and solo scoring; great independence of parts; diverse instrumentation requirements; and some use of extreme ranges and techniques. The authors also acknowledged, "Even if the most precise criteria are strictly adhered to, the resultant assignment of grade may not seem right," and "Grading music becomes an art in itself, with experience, and 'feel' of a piece being the best guides" (Dvorak et al., 1986, p. 10).

Dvorak et al. (1986) emphasized that assigning difficulty levels is a complicated task. Adhering to precise grading criteria does not conduce to proper grading, as music is not an exact science. These scholars called the grading process an art, stressing that the evaluator's level of experience and technical/aesthetic standards often determine the ultimate difficulty level. They acknowledged that, even with strict adherence to the most precise criteria, the resultant grade assignments might not seem correct, and music grading becomes an art form in which a 'feel' of a piece is the best guide for learners.

Dvorak et al. (1986) grouped musical works into three sections: (a) concert and festival works for young band, (b) concert marches for young band, and (c) concert and festival works for young wind ensemble. Each section lists selections alphabetically by composer, and the difficulty level, duration, publisher, and a short description of each work accompanies each. This book focuses on selecting quality difficulty-level-specific literature for grades 1, 2, and 3 (Table 5).

Table 5

Criteria for Difficulty-Level Assignments for Grades 1 to 3 (Dvorak et al., 1986)

Grade	Criteria
Ι	Basic rhythms. Restricted ranges. Underdeveloped technique. Homophonic texture. Much uniformity of rhythms throughout the band. Ample doubling. Much full and half <i>tutti</i> scoring. Suitable for first year elementary school bands, and beginning middle school or junior high school bands. Not useful for high school bands.
Π	Intermediate rhythms; some syncopation; duplet and triplet rhythms. Expanding ranges. Fluent technique. Changing meters. Some independence of parts. Mature musical constructs. Suitable for second year elementary bands. Suitable for beginning-of-the year training works for third year middle school or junior high bands. Also suitable for young, beginner high school bands (9th grade) as beginning music, and

mature high school bands (9th or 10th grade) as works of limited technical challenge.

III Challenging rhythms; free use of syncopation. Free use of section and solo scoring. Greater independence of parts. Diverse instrumentation, less use of cues and cross-cues. Some use of extreme ranges and technique. Suitable for mature third year middle school bands or mature third year junior bands. Suitable as challenging material for first-year (both 9th and 10th grade) high school bands or slightly challenging material for mature high school bands (both 9th and 10th grade). Also, suitable as beginning-of-the year easy training for mature (11th and 12th grade high school bands).

Dvorak et al. (1993) offered three main criteria for selecting band music in *Best Music for High School Band*, a guide to high-school band and wind ensemble repertoire for advanced bands. The authors revised their previous descriptions to use a six-level grading system using Roman numerals (Grades I-VI) for difficulty levels. They provided detailed descriptions for Grades I-V but mentioned Grade VI as suitable for only advanced college and professional musicians. The book provided little detail about any of these categories, perhaps because the authors presumed that professional musicians could competently play all levels of music. Instead, the authors focused on selecting quality difficulty-level band literature for grades 4, 5, and 6 (Table 6).

Table 6

Criteria for Difficulty-Level Assignments for Grades 4 to 6 (Dvorak et al., 1993)

Grade	Criteria
IV	Challenging rhythms including free use of syncopation; changing meters, asymmetrical meters; expanded ranges for all instruments; fluent technique; free use of solo writing; diverse instrumentation requirements, especially in regards to woodwinds and percussion. Not suitable for junior high school bands. Suitable for good high school bands and as challenging material for the "second band" in many high schools, or as slightly

challenging material for small college band programs, and as challenging material for some community bands.

- V Very challenging rhythms including polyrhythms; changing meters, asymmetrical meters, non-metric notation; extreme ranges for all instruments; extremely fluent technique, free use of solo writing; diverse instrumentation requirements, including piano, harp, and percussion; virtuoso writing throughout. Suitable only for the finest high-school bands, and as challenging material for good college bands, as challenging material for the "second band" in most colleges, and as challenging material for many community bands and some professional bands.
- VI Repertoire suitable for advanced university bands, community bands and professional bands.

Concert Band Music Grading Criteria

Wareham (1967) and Saville (1991) both conducted significant investigations concerning the grading of band music into six difficulty levels. Wareham (1967) used the five following criteria to assess the difficulty of the music: (a) key signatures, (b) accidentals, (c) range, (d) meter signatures, and (e) rhythmic characteristics. Wareham's study revealed several factors that strengthen the argument for the necessity of establishing an objective system for the rating of music. He mentioned the significant variability in the difficulty level between sixteen graded band lists and little difference between key signatures, meter, and accidents for Grades V and VI. He also noted a wide fluctuation of scores between the five variables of (a) key signatures, (b) accidentals, (c) range, (d) meter signatures, and (e) rhythmic characteristics within a single composition.

Saville (1991) conducted a study that gave band directors an objective evaluation tool with which to rate the difficulty levels of the individual instrument parts in band compositions. By comparing and combining previous studies, he concluded that key, range, rhythm/meter, tempo, dynamics, and intonation control were the six most critical technical characteristics or criteria that represent the difficulty of a composition. He determined that key was consistently the least useful criterion in determining difficulty, and dynamic control was essential for only lower difficulty levels. Intonation was relevant for only the more difficult levels of compositions. Tempo was the best predictor of overall global ratings for all ranges of difficulty.

Music Publishers' Rating Systems

State music associations' school band contest lists are perhaps the most influential repertoire selection source, and music publishers have grading guidelines (Harris & Walls, 1996). A comparison of the guidelines of three prominent instrumental music publishers who post their grading criteria online—Alfred Music's (2002) Belwin concert band series, FJH Music Company's (FJH, 2015) concert band series, the Hal Leonard (Mardak & Morton, 2015) band series—illustrates inconsistencies among music grading levels. Each publisher lists its grading criteria on its website and in its catalogs (Table 7).

Prominent Instrumental Music Publisher Grading Guidelines

Series Name	Grade	Grading Criteria	
Belwin Concert Band Series Guidelines (AM, 2002)			
Very Beginning Band	Grade ½	Instrumentation and Special Considerations	
Beginning Band	Grade 1-1 1/2	Instrumentation and Special Considerations	
Young Band	Grade 2-2 ¹ / ₂	Instrumentation and Special Considerations	
Concert Band	Grade 3-3 ¹ / ₂	Instrumentation and Special Considerations	

Symphonic Band

Instrumentation and Special Considerations

FJH Concert Band Series Guidelines (FJH, 2015)

Grade 4+

Starter Series	Grade .5	Ideal for the first several months of instruction. All instruments are limited to a 6-note diatonic range.
Beginning Band	Grade 1	Appropriate within the first year of instruction and beginning of the second year. Plenty of doublings in the lower voices.
Developing Band	Grade 1.5	Slightly more advanced than beginning band. Rhythms and ranges are expanded to accommodate the end of first-year as well as second-year instruction.
Young Band	Grades 2-2.5	Appropriate for middle-school and smaller high-school groups. A few independent parts and instrumentation increase slightly.
Concert Band	Grades 3-3.5	Designed for high-school and upper-level middle-school groups. Many lines are cross- cued.
Symphonic Band	Grades 4-5	Appropriate for accomplished high school, college, and professional groups. Includes expanded instrumentation and ranges.

Hal Leonard Band Series Guidelines (Mardak & Morton, 2015)

Very Easy	Grade 1	1 year playing experience
Easy	Grade 2	2 years playing experience
Medium	Grade 3	3-4 years playing experience

Medium Advanced	Grade 4	N/A
Advanced	Grade 5	N/A
Professional	Р	N/A

Publishers base grading systems on two main elements: (a) years of playing experience, and (b) level of technical difficulty. Alfred Music's (2002) guidelines are the most comprehensive and include: instrumentation, key signatures, time signatures, rhythm, and special considerations that outline specific compositional techniques, crosscueing, and awkward leaps or ranges. FJH's (2015) guidelines are short and general. They mention no key or time signatures and very few technical or musical elements but refer to specific instrument ranges and expanded instrumentation in higher-difficulty levels. The Hal Leonard (Mardak & Morton, 2015) scale mentions only years of experience for the first three levels: medium advanced, advanced, or professional. There is no mention of other technical elements.

The Pennsylvania-based sheet music distributor, J.W. Pepper & Son, also uses a grading classification system. Various states have different criteria for assigning difficulty levels to concert band compositions for contest use (Howlett & Sugrue, 2014). Some state music associations use a 1-6 (easiest to most difficult) point scale; others have a seven-point scale. Some use a colored system; others use letters when assigning difficulty level to their state music lists. In an attempt to create a uniform system of classification that can be applied to music from the various publishers sold by J.W. Pepper & Son, the distributor uses verbal descriptions. In this way, conflicts with publishers and state grading scales are avoided. On the one hand, that may serve to level

the playing field across publishers represented in the Pepper catalogue. On the other, it may serve to further complicate the selection process. As the Pepper Basic Grading and Descriptive System documents state, Howlett and Sugrue (2014) outlined a seven-level grading system based upon students' playing experience and school levels (Table 8). Table 8

J.W. Pepper & Son Music Grading Seven-Level Grading Codes (Howlett & Sugrue, 2014)

Code	Meaning
В	beginning (first semester students, uses only six notes, no eighth notes)
VE	very easy (elementary school level)
E	easy (middle school level)
ME	medium easy (junior high/middle school to easy high school level)
М	medium (solid high school to college level)
MA	medium advanced (difficult high-school to college level)
А	advanced (college level)

Howlett and Sugrue (2014) presented how J.W. Pepper & Son defined their parameters for grading their music but provided a disclaimer that their grading system may not correspond directly with a publisher's level. They noted that their literature provides a basic guideline of what to expect at the different levels (Table 9).

Table 9

J.W. Pepper & Son Music Grading Definition (Howlett & Sugrue, 2014)

Level	Definition

Beginning Band (BB)	This level is obviously for a group that is just starting out. It is mostly used by elementary schools and has little to no complexity of rhythms and quite a small range of notes. These pieces truly start the players from square 1 and work on the basics of playing. The keys most likely used are Bb (B-Flat) and F, which are easiest for these types of ensembles.
Very Easy (VE)	These items might be used by 1 st year groups. The range of notes may vary a little bit more than BB, but there is still no 'break' in the clarinet, which is something quite difficult for them to learn. These pieces may also begin to add eighth-notes in with half-notes and quarter-notes. Their keys are typically Bb, F, and Eb.
Easy (E)	Depending on how frequently the groups are able to meet during the first year, this level would probably be used by 2 nd year ensembles. Trumpets may begin to add notes above the staff. 1 st Clarinet parts may have notes above the 'break' that was mentioned earlier, but the 2 nd Clarinet parts still stay below that. Rhythmically, there are more eighth- notes added, some more complex rhythms and more activity in the percussion parts.
Medium Easy (ME)	These pieces are typically used by middle schools, or possibly smaller high schools. They become a little more rhythmically active, including sixteenth-notes. The range of notes becomes more difficult as well- Trombones go up to an F above the bass clef, trumpets can go up to a G, both clarinet parts can go above the break, and there are more percussion parts and instruments used.
Medium (M)	This is the most elusive of the ratings, especially for band. Typically, high school ensembles can perform these pieces. It does, however vary state to state, as well as region to region. There start to be even more complicated sixteenth- notes together in the Woodwinds, and the pieces tend to sound more advanced.
Medium Advanced (MA)	These are typically played by advanced high schools or colleges and universities. They start to get into techniques

	that need to be practiced and would be known by advanced players.
Advanced (A)	These pieces are played at the college or professional level. If you are looking at classic pieces, these are the originals (not arranged by anyone).

The American Band College of Central Washington University, a master's degree program designed by and for band directors, has its own musical grading chart for its selections. Thirteen indicators define the difficulty levels, which are limited to five, with no limit to the ability level (e.g., first-year, second-year, junior high school, high school, university, professional), as mentioned in previous lists (American Band College of Central Washington University, 2000; Table 10).

Table 10

American Band College Music Grading Chart (American Band College of Central Washington University, 2000)

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Meter	Simple: 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, C, ¢	2/4, 3/4, 4/4, C, ¢, 6/8 (easy compound)	2/4, 3/4, 4/4, C, ¢, 6/8, 9/8 (easy	Add: 3/8, 6/8, 9/8,	Any meter or combination of meter
			changing/asymmetrical meter)	asymmetrical(5/8, 7/8), changing meter	
Key Signature	One to three flats (Key of C – end of year)	None to four flats	None to five flats	One sharp to six flats	Any key
Tempo	Andante-Moderato (72-120)	Andante-Allegro (72-132), ritard, accel.	Largo-Allegro (56-114), ritard, accel., rall.	Largo-Presto (44- 168), ritard, accel., rall	Largo-Prestissimo (44-208) ritard, accel., rall.
Note/Rest Value		As in Grade 1 plus simple 16th note patterns and triplets	All values in duple excluding complex syncopation plus easy compound rhythms	All values in duple All values in compound	Complex duple and compound rhythms
Rhythm	Simple; mostly unison rhythm (dotted rhythm end of year)	Add simple syncopation & well-prepared dotted rhythms. More use of non- unison rhythms	Basic duple and triple syncopation, dotted rhythms	All rhythms except complex compound or complex 16th note syncopation	All rhythms
Dynamics	p to f	<i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> short cresc., decresc.	<i>pp</i> to <i>ff</i> cresc., <i>sfz</i> , <i>fp</i>	<i>ppp</i> to <i>fff</i> broad cresc., decresc.	<i>ppp</i> to <i>fff</i> , cross dynamics, broad cresc., decresc.
Articulation	Attack, release, slurs, staccato, accent	Attack, release, slurs, staccato, accent, legato	Attack, release, slurs, staccato, accent, legato, tenuto	Two or more articulations simultaneously in the ensemble	All forms of articulation
Ornaments	None	Simple trills and single grace figures	Trills with entry or exit grace notes, double or triple grace note figures	Trills, turns, mordents	Trills, turns, mordents
Scoring	Limited color combinations (clar-tpt, sax-tpt) Very limited part division within sections	Independent contrapuntal lines, limited exposed parts, 1 (possibly 2) horn parts	Solos (fl, cl, sax, tpt, bar) Exposed woodwind or brass. 2-part horns	Full range of instrumentation, exposed parts for any instrument	Full range of instrumentation, exposed parts for any instrument, multiple solo/contrapuntal lines
Length	1 to 3 minutes	2 to 5 minutes	3 to 7 minutes	6 minutes+	Any length

Things to Avoid	Exposed solos, divisi tbn or horn parts, clarinet crossing the break, frequent meter changes, key changes, changing syncopated rhythms	Frequent key changes, frequent meter changes, wide range for 3rd parts	Extreme low and high registers, technical playing for 3rd players. Difficult oboe or bassoon solos	Extremes of range	Limited only by player ability
Percussion Usage	Pitched: bells. Non-pitched: triangle, tambourine, cymbals, woodblock, snare, bass drum. Limited use of special effects	Add: Pitched: chimes, xylophone. Non-pitched: timpani. Special effects on cymbals.	All common non-pitched Latin and traditional percussion. Limit range of special effects	All instruments. Wide range of special effects	All instruments. Wide range of special effects with diverse requirements for each
Flute*					
Oboe					
Bassoon*					
Clarinet*					
Alto/Bass Clarinet*					
Saxophone*					
Trumpet*	0				10 p
Horn*					૿ૺૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૢૺ
Trombone/Baritone					
Tuba	p bo		P		

Notes. * = Whole notes indicate end-of-year, advanced range.

While prescribed or required repertoire assessment lists can benefit school ensembles, they also contain grading discrepancies that may complicate music selection. This lack of agreement on standards can leave band directors confused about what is best for their ensembles to play. Some states, including Alabama and Ohio, categorize the literature by difficulty levels 1-7. Others, such as Arkansas, California, and Florida, assign by difficulty levels 1-6. Furthermore, Idaho, Louisiana, Oregon, and Texas use five levels; Wisconsin, four; Minnesota, three (Stevenson, 2003).

Core repertoire development continues to be hard for directors because arriving at a consensus on what constitutes a core repertoire remains problematic (McCrann, 2016). Different organizations use varying grading systems, which further complicates the repertoire selection process (Hopkins, 2013). Publishers, state festival lists, and sheet music suppliers all use grading methods but may use different numbering systems, mixtures of numbers and symbols, color levels, and verbal descriptions (Hopkins, 2013). Moreover, people who assign particular difficulty levels to pieces of music have different opinions about the types of musical and technical challenges acceptable to present to particular difficulty levels. Also, not all publishers explain their criteria (Hopkins, 2013).

Repertoire Selection Process and Practices

Music educators must establish the musical competency levels of the individual students in the ensemble, as well as a baseline of their skill levels, at the start of the school year through skill checks or auditions (Hopkins, 2013). Following this, educators must learn the grading systems of the most proximal organizations, then must categorize and grade the literature personally. They can do so by enforcing some sight-reading days and assessing student ability to progress through the musical pieces (Hopkins, 2013).

Atchison (2015) also emphasized that state repertoire lists from various states such as Texas, Illinois, Georgia, Florida, and Virginia are useful references for a musical director.

In addition, the director must designate separate segments in each rehearsal for (a) the development of students' musical skills and (b) rehearsal of the actual repertoire. This ensures sufficient student skill development according to the piece's technical difficulty and reinforces what the student has already learned (Hopkins, 2013). Directors and teachers should consider how the selected pieces relate to one another, as well as to the students' pedagogical needs (Atchison, 2015). The educator must ensure each piece's suitability by factoring in the ensemble's stamina, the students' maturity level, their ability to perform the piece's tempo, and their rehearsal availability (Atchison, 2015; Hopkins, 2013). Repertoire selection must reflect diverse musical styles and tonal language across the pieces. The program's purpose should also be considered (i.e., festival, thematic program, or concert) within the context of a repertoire that enables the students to experience a wide array of musical styles and keys. The educator's awareness of the students' technical needs and endurance levels in mind would ensure that the program helps them build meaningful future student musical goals (Atchison, 2015).

These criteria apply to choral music selection as well. Watson (2016) conducted a study to identify frequently listed choral selections in state festival repertoire lists. The author surveyed state repertoire directors' opinions on the most essential music selections for their students, developed a comprehensive list of musical pieces the literature often recommended without publishers' influence and assessed the relationship between this resultant list and the opinions of repertoire directors. Watson (2016) concluded that choral music educators' opinions on repertoire selection often align with the musical

pieces included in the developed list. The author also stressed that repertoire directors often value individual musical styles, and educators can enhance teaching by programming repertoire from a variety of eras, genres, countries, composers, and languages, suggesting a comprehensive approach to musical style.

Most guidelines suggest looking at repertoire selection lists available to the educator to assist with selection decisions. While most lists stratify musical pieces for quality and difficulty, it is the printed scores assigned to musical pieces that present music as simple in notation but often challenging to execute. The educator's ability to assess the scores carefully and think about the musical demands of a particular piece without depending entirely on printed scores is important (Hopkins, 2013).

In addition, Chen (2018) noticed that some teachers face various challenges when defining the difficulty and quality level of music. These include pressure to fill their repertoires with a multicultural selection of music. Some teachers overcome these challenges by engaging in democratic classroom procedures, involving the students in the learning process, soliciting their input, engaging in professional sharing and networking, and using various resources to procure their music selections (Chen, 2018).

Summary

The body of literature on this topic offers different criteria for grading musical pieces and insight into the ideal repertoire selection processes for musical directors. However, empirical studies on how musical directors and educators assess published scores against their personal perceptions of a piece's musical difficulty and quality are lacking. In this study, the researcher examined discrepancies between concert band publishers' difficulty-level guidelines, band directors' perceptions, and directors' criteria

for selecting difficulty-level appropriate repertoire. A comparison of data collected from the participants' perceived grading level of compositions to the actual publishers' grading criteria was the root of this study. Such information may reveal band directors' methods for selecting grade-appropriate concert band literature.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study, to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band publishers' difficulty grading systems and the perceptions of the band directors who program this music, was accomplished by recruiting concert band directors (N = 168) from American schools at elementary through college levels. This population of American concert band directors does not appear to have readily available and verifiable demographic information. I randomly generated the sample from respondents to an advertisement in public state concert band association newsgroups, online instrumental music forums, and instrumental music social media forums. Only individuals who have obtained a music educator or administrator license were eligible for inclusion in the study.

I begin this chapter by identifying and rationalizing the chosen research design before moving into a discussion of the methodology, which includes descriptions of the population and sampling procedures. After this, I provide a description of the recruitment and data collection process, followed by a description of the instrumentation used to collect the data for this study. Next, a description of the data analysis process is provided, followed by discussions of the validity and ethical considerations of this procedure. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of relevant information.

Research Design and Rationale

A quantitative descriptive design was used in this research. A quantitative

approach is appropriate where relevant information can be accurately and adequately derived from numerical data, which is essential for establishing relationships between variables or measuring "how much" type research questions (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative methods are most useful when a study seeks to provide a thorough and indepth exploration of a phenomenon by using a broad lens on a small sample (Richards & Hemphill, 2018).

A descriptive research design is appropriate when there is a need to provide an accurate and systematic description of a phenomenon from multiple perspectives (Dulock, 1993). Other research designs were considered for this study but deemed inappropriate due to their misalignment with the goals. I specifically focused on providing an accurate description of the phenomenon of discrepant difficulty ratings for music pieces and accomplished this through the collection of data that demonstrates this discrepancy, measures its magnitude, and assists in identifying its potential causes. Methodology

The population of interest for this study included American concert band directors and music administrators. Perceptions between these groups are considered discretely. Music administrators are included because administrators may have previously been band directors, and are often grouped with band directors in the literature. As supported in the review of literature, there is a lack of recent data specifically related to the number of American concert band directors and music administrators. This is due, in part, because primary and secondary music educators are grouped with other educators into a general category, while post-secondary music educators are grouped with arts and drama educators. A reasonable estimate of between 150,000 and 200,000 is appropriate for the

size of this population because it includes educators at both public and private schools through the United States, as well as retired educators (Thau-Eleff, 2020). The lack of recent information about the size of this population also prevents a discussion of the general demographics.

I used a purposeful sampling approach by publishing an invitation to participate in a location accessible to the vast majority of the target population (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Participants were enrolled on a rolling basis over the course of three months. Only individuals who received a music education or administration credential were included in the sample. Participants were selected based on their responses to the advertisement and the recommendation of other band directors. The sample included 168 participants from a 26 states.

All participants completed a survey, which is described in detail below. Survey completion required no more than 30 minutes. After completion of the survey, participants had no further requests for action. Information was maintained in a manner that ensured confidentiality and, where applicable, withdrawal procedures were followed. In the next section, the researcher discusses the ethical issues and considerations of this study.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Recruitment occurred on a rolling basis over a three-month period from an advertisement for this study in public state concert band association newsgroups, online instrumental music forums, and instrumental music forums. I selected volunteer participants (N = 168) of concert band directors from American schools at the elementary-college levels for this study. Subjects were selected from inquiry responses

and recommendations from other directors.

Potential subjects were sent an invitation letter via email (Appendix C) and posted in social media forums (Appendix D). The invitation described the survey and contained an informed consent form and a survey link that allowed access to a Google Forms survey, which is described in detail below. The survey included demographic questions, as well as two separate sections for gathering data. Each survey link allowed only one individual to access the survey on a web browser; after completing the survey, access was terminated. I maintained the collected data on the Google platform, which was password-protected until analysis began.

Instrumentation

The three-part survey instrument was designed and hosted on Google Forms, which allowed for completion of the survey and data storage. The first section of the survey collected participants' demographic information (Appendix E). No information that could allow for the identification of the subject was collected. Respondents remained anonymous. The second section of the survey included Likert-type scale and checkbox responses to five items meant to gauge the participants' perceptions of repertoire selection methodology (Appendix F).

The final section (Appendix G), included 10 excerpts from concert band pieces, selected from the repertoire on the National Band Association Selective Music List (2019) and the Texas University Interscholastic League Prescribed Music List (2019). An analysis of the National Band Association Selective Music List (2019) and the University Interscholastic League Prescribed Music List (2019) were examined to determine the mode of the publishers with the most pieces within those lists who visibly

provide their difficulty-grading criteria. These lists utilize two different grading systems. The National Band Association Selective Music List (2019) is based upon a five-level grading system (Grade 1 [easy] – Grade 5 [difficult]), while the University Interscholastic League Prescribed Music List (2019) is based upon a six-level grading system (Grade 1 [easy] – Grade 6 [difficult]). While this supports the disparity between these lists, in this study, I used the publisher's assigned grade level—rather than the state list grade level—to support publisher grade level assignments.

A random sampling of 10 concert band pieces' excerpts from the three most represented publishers who have detailed grading criteria was selected. Participants accessed PDF-formatted excerpts from within the survey via a link. To obtain uniformity of treatment for each composition, the following musical criteria, derived from the selected publishers' grading guidelines, were used:

- 1. Tessitura
- 2. Rhythmic Difficulty
- 3. Tempo
- 4. Key Signatures
- 5. Time Signatures
- 6. Wind Instrumentation
- 7. Percussion Instrumentation
- 8. Part Independence
- 9. Cross-Cueing Options
- 10. Musical Density

Participants viewed a random sampling of 10 excerpts and assigned them a

difficulty level from Grade 1 (least difficult) to Grade 6 (most difficult). Repertoire was selected from recent (1994-2019) repertoire of three American concert band publishers (Appendix G). The total number of measures within the composition was not revealed insofar as that may have provided a clue as to the predetermined difficulty level of the work. The degree to which groups agree on difficulty levels of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. After collecting the data, I engaged in analysis to determine the extent to which directors' perceptions of concert band literature difficulty correlated with the publishers' assigned difficulty level for each composition.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis involved the calculation of descriptive statistics. I compared the mean of participants' responses to the publisher ratings, as well as standard deviations of participants' responses to determine discrepancy magnitude. Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed for categorical similarities, which allowed for the construction and coding of data. Those data were subsequently analyzed in the same manner as noted for the quantitative data.

Threats to Validity

In this study, I did not set out to show causal relationships. Therefore, there was no real threat to the internal validity of the study. External validity was likely to be problematic for this study because of the narrow scope. I intended to examine a potential discrepancy between the perceptions of music educators and music publishers. The results of the study, therefore, are unlikely to apply to studies removed from the specific context of this study. The findings may be applicable to studies that share a similar context, such as studies evaluating discrepancies between the perceptions of

educators and the producers of specifically rated material. A close context may exist regarding difficulty-level ratings for literature and the perceptions of educators; however, by providing a detailed description of the context, the current findings may enable others to determine the likely applicability of the results of this study to other situations.

The most significant risk to the validity comes from the statistical conclusions. The validity of these conclusions could be compromised if subjects have prior knowledge of the publisher-identified difficult rating of a piece. The process of music selection was such that most, if not all, music was likely to be unfamiliar to most participants.

Ethical Procedures

All compliance guidelines for the Institutional Review Board of Temple University were followed (Appendix A). No known harm was anticipated for subjects. No personal data or personally identifying information were collected. All data were maintained in secure, password-protected files. Each participant received an individual email invitation, and all data were stored on the student investigator's computer. To further ensure subject anonymity and data confidentiality, the student investigator stored a copy of the data on a USB memory stick in a locked drawer in his home office for a maximum of three (3) years, after which the information will be destroyed. Results and incidental findings will be shared with the subjects.

A consent form was included on the first page of the online survey (Appendix C). The survey's instructions described the nature and purpose of the study, and participants indicated their consent by taking the survey. Because participants responded to it individually, they were unable to coerce or influence one another in any way.

Subjects could exit the survey and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Subjects who wished to be excluded or removed from this study for any reason were able to notify the researcher via email, telephone, or written documentation. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence by exiting out of the survey. The survey responses and data from participants who withdrew from the study were deleted.

There were no direct benefits to participants in the research study. They may become more reflective or self-aware of their roles as band directors and the impact of those roles on the students' playing ability after sharing their process. Indirectly, however, this research may help music publishers standardize their grading scales or assist concert band directors better understand and assess compositions.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band publisher difficulty grading systems and the perceptions of the band directors who program this music. The researcher accomplished this by recruiting 168 concert band directors from American schools at the elementary through college levels. A quantitative descriptive study was the most appropriate approach for the current study because of the reducible nature of the data and the desire to understand the phenomenon entirely.

All data were collected using a survey comprised of Likert scale, checkbox, and open-ended questions. Subjects provided demographic information, information regarding their perceptions of repertoire selection methodology, and their difficultylevel assessment of 10 musical excerpts. Quantitative data were analyzed through the

calculation of descriptive statistics. All data were stored in protected files, rendered anonymous, and purged of potentially identifying information. Subjects could review the results of the study, and all data will be destroyed three (3) years after completion of the study. Its results are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this study, I aimed to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band publishers' difficulty-grading systems and the perceptions of concert band directors who program this music. Band directors (N = 168) from elementary through college-level American schools were recruited. Their demographic information is not readily available or verifiable. Sampling was limited to those who responded to an advertisement posted in public state concert band association newsgroups, online instrumental music forums, and instrumental music social media forums. The sample used in this study was randomly generated from those respondents. Data on the sample were collected in an online Google survey.

Only individuals with music educator or administrator licenses were eligible for the study. Three subjects (N = 3) answered that they were not licensed music educators; hence they were not permitted to complete the survey. Additional demographic information and open-ended questions were included in the overall design of the study.

Overall Demographics

Demographic data were collected using the following questions: (a) What is your current position/job title? (b) How many years have you taught? (c) What grade level are you currently teaching? (d) In what state do you teach? (e) What is your highest completed degree? (f) Does your state have a prescribed graded music list? (g) What is your primary instrument?

Table 11 displays the distribution of participants' responses (N = 168) to question #1, "What is your current position/job title?"

Table 11

Distributions of Current Position/Job Title in Responses (N = 168)

Current Position/Job Title	п	%
Band Director	140	83.3
Administrator	11	6.5
Music Supervisor	9	5.4
Retired Music Educator	4	2.4
Other	4	2.4

Table 12 displays the distribution of participants' responses (N = 168) to question #2, "How many years have you taught?"

Table 12

Years of Teaching Experience (N = 168)

Experience in Years	п	%
Greater than 11	118	70.2
6-10	27	16.1
2-5	22	13.1
Less than ≤ 1	1	.6

Table 13 displays the distribution of participants' responses (N = 162) to question #3, "What grade level are you currently teaching?" While only 162 responses were registered, participants were able to select multiple levels of instruction, and the total responses were 210 (N = 210).

Table 13

*Teaching Level (*N = 210*)*

Teaching Level	n	%
Elementary School	24	14.8
Middle School	75	46.3
High School	83	52.1
College/University	24	14.8
Professional	4	2.5

Respondents responded to question #4 to indicate their state of employment at the time of the survey. Results showed that 27 states were represented (Table 14). Responses from Maryland were the highest at 50%; Pennsylvania at 19%; Virginia at 8.9%; and other states, from 0.6% to 2.4%. The surveyor resides in Maryland and has worked extensively in the mid-Atlantic region, which may explain why those states were most represented. Additionally, the surveyor personally advertised and recruited members and colleagues from the mid-Atlantic region to participate in the survey.

Table 14

Respondents' State of Employment (N = 168)

State	п	%
Alabama	1	0.6
Alaska	0	0.0
Arizona	0	0.0
Arkansas	0	0.0
California	1	0.6
Colorado	1	0.6
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Connecticut	1	0.6
Delaware	3	1.8
Florida	2	1.2
Georgia	2	1.2
Hawaii	1	0.6
Idaho	1	0.6
Illinois	0	0.0
Indiana	2	1.2
Iowa	2	1.2
Kansas	1	0.6
Kentucky	0	0.0
Louisiana	1	0.6
Maine	0	0.0
Maryland	84	50.0
Massachusetts	2	1.2
Michigan	1	0.6
Minnesota	0	0.0
Mississippi	0	0.0
Missouri	1	0.6
Montana	0	0.0
Nebraska	0	0.0
Nevada	0	0.0
New Hampshire	1	0.6

New Jersey	3	1.8
New Mexico	0	0.0
New York	1	0.6
North Carolina	1	0.6
North Dakota	0	0.0
Ohio	2	1.2
Oklahoma	0	0.0
Oregon	2	1.2
Pennsylvania	32	19.0
Rhode Island	0	0.0
South Carolina	0	0.0
South Dakota	0	0.0
Tennessee	0	0.0
Texas	3	1.8
Utah	0	0.0
Vermont	0	0.0
Virginia	15	8.9
Washington	0	0.0
West Virginia	0	0.0
Wisconsin	1	0.6
Wyoming	0	0.0

Table 15 displays the distribution of participants' responses (N = 168) to question #5, "What is your highest completed degree?"

Table 15

Level of Education (N = 168)

Highest Completed Degree	п	%
Bachelor's Degree (B.M., B.A., B.S.)	43	25.6
Master's Degree (M.A., M.S., M.M., M. Ed.)	109	64.9
Doctorate (Ph.D., D.M.A., Ed.D.)	16	9.5

The University Interscholastic League (UIL) in Texas uses a Prescribed Music List (PML). Other states use music lists of concert band compositions from which directors must select pieces to perform at their local, regional, or national assessments. Table 16 (N = 168) shows participants' responses to question #6, "Does your state have a prescribed graded music list?"

Table 16

Prescribed Music List (N = 168)

Prescribed Music List	n	%
Yes	132	78.6
No	18	10.7
I Don't Know	18	10.7

Respondents' primary instruments are indicated in Table 17. I used this information to determine whether there was a correlation between participants' primary instrument and whether this influenced what instruments were considered to determine tessitura importance related to difficulty. The results indicated that the primary instrument did not affect tessitura selection. Table 17

Instrument	n	%
Trumpet	33	19.6
Percussion	28	16.7
Clarinet	23	13.7
Saxophone	23	13.7
Flute	17	10.1
Trombone	14	8.3
Tuba	12	7.1
Horn	7	4.2
Baritone/Euphonium	4	2.4
Oboe	2	1.2
Piano	2	1.2
Bassoon	1	0.6
Bass Clarinet	1	0.6
Guitar	1	0.6
Strings	0	0.0
Voice	0	0.0

Primary Instrument Classification (N = 168)

Perceptions

The survey's next section concerned participants' overall perceptions of how they selected concert band repertoire, as well as their opinions on how concert band music publishers rated and ranked the difficulty level of their company's compositions. Throughout this section, difficulty-level ratings refer to the publisher-assigned performance difficulty. The purpose of the first three questions in this section was to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band publishers' difficulty grading systems and the perceptions of the band directors who program this music

The first two questions used a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Table 18 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the responses to question #1, "My perception of grade-level ratings is mostly the same as the publishers';" question #2, "My perception of grade-level ratings is mostly different than the publishers';" and question #3 which asked respondents to share perceptions regarding how publishers determine grade-level ratings for the music in their catalogues. Answer choices included: (a) The publisher rates pieces much harder than band directors' perceptions; (b) The publisher rates pieces somewhat harder than band directors' perceptions; (c) No discrepancy; (d) The publisher rates pieces somewhat easier than band directors' perceptions; and (e) The publisher rates pieces much easier than band directors' perceptions.

Table 18

Level of Agreement and Difficulty for Perception of Publishers' Grade-Level Ratings (N = 168)

Variable	M	SD	Low	High
Ratings Match Publishers' ^a	2.90	0.99	1.00	5.00
Ratings Diverge from Publishers' ^a	3.08	0.95	1.00	5.00
Publisher Ratings of Grade-Level ^b	2.80	0.98	1.00	5.00

^a Ratings were based on a five-point scale: 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*.

^b Ratings were based on a five-point scale: 1 = Much Easier than Perceptions of Band Directors to 5 = Much Harder than Perceptions of Band Directors.

Question #4 required respondents to reflect on their own practices in answering, "Upon which criteria do you base your selection of grade-level-appropriate literature for your ensemble?" Participants were asked to rate levels of importance on a scale of 1 - 5(1 = not important at all; 5 = extremely important) for each of 10 criteria: composition length or duration; rhythmic difficulty/complexity; tempo; key signatures; time signatures/meter; instrumentation/scoring; percussion instrumentation; part independence; cross-cueing options; and musical density. Table 19 provides the descriptive statistics for each criterion.

Table 19

Importance of Criteria for Selecting Grade-Level Appropriate Literature for Ensemble (N = 168)

Criterion	M	SD	Low	High
Composition Length	2.76	0.92	1.00	5.00
Rhythmic Difficulty/Complexity	3.95	0.75	1.00	5.00
Tempo	2.75	0.89	1.00	5.00
Key Signatures	3.51	1.11	1.00	5.00
Time Signatures/Meter	3.34	0.98	1.00	5.00
Wind Instrumentation/Scoring	4.05	0.91	1.00	5.00
Percussion Instrumentation	3.61	1.00	1.00	5.00
Part Independence	4.00	0.93	1.00	5.00
Cross-Cueing Options	2.88	1.13	1.00	5.00
Musical Density	3.41	0.94	1.00	5.00

Note. Ratings were based on a five-point scale: 1 = Not Important at All to 5 = Extremely Important.

Finally, respondents were asked to respond "yes" or "no" to, "Do you consider tessitura (instrument range) as an important criterion when selecting grade-level appropriate repertoire?" A "no" answer moved the respondent to the next survey section. Participants who answered "yes" were presented with specific instrument tessitura questions. Table 20 illustrates that an overwhelming majority, 98.2% support the idea that tessitura is an essential factor when determining grade-level appropriate music, while 1.8% stated that it was not an important criterion.

Table 20

Tessitura Importance (N = 168)

Category	п	%
Yes	165	98.2
No	3	1.8

Table 21 provides the descriptive statistics for participants' responses for the importance of tessitura on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not important at all; 5 = extremely important) for each of the eight band instruments: flute, double reeds (oboe and bassoon), Bb clarinet, saxophone (all), trumpet, horn, low brass, and percussion

Table 21

Instrument	М	SD	Low	High
Flute	3.17	0.91	1.00	5.00
Double Reed	3.11	1.03	1.00	5.00
Clarinet	3.88	0.93	1.00	5.00
Saxophone	2.85	0.85	1.00	5.00
Trumpet	4.43	0.64	2.00	5.00
F Horn	3.94	0.87	1.00	5.00
Low Brass	3.83	0.84	1.00	5.00
Percussion	1.90	1.03	1.00	5.00

*Tessitura Importance for Band Instruments (*N = 168*)*

Note. Ratings were based on a five-point scale: 1 = *Not Important at All* to 5 = *Extremely Important.*

Perceived Concert Band Grading Recommendations

Section 3 enabled the participants to review Grade 1 to 6 difficulty levels of

excerpts from 10 previously published concert band compositions. The compositions'

title, composer, publisher, and year of publication are listed in Table 22.

Published Band Compositions

Selection	Title	Composer	Publisher	Year
#1	Conviction	Clark	Carl Fischer	2012
#2	Ballade	Jenkins	Alfred Music	2003
#3	Africa: Ceremony, Song and Ritual	Smith	Belwin	1994
#4	Circus Maximus	Corigliano	Carl Fischer	2006

#5	Ghost Fleet	Sheldon	Alfred Music	2001
#6	In a French Garden	Meyer	Alfred Music	1998
#7	Invictus	Balmages	FJH Music	2000
#8	Corps of Discovery	Owens	FJH Music	2010
#9	Pablo!	Meyer	Alfred Music	2002
#10	Contempo	Story	Alfred Music	2004

Table 23 displays the publisher grade level, and the mode, mean, and standard deviation for the participants' perceptions of the grade level for each selected composition. The modal information was used to reveal clustering of raw data.

Table 23

Selection	Grade Level	Mode	М	SD
#1	1	2.00	1.76	0.75
#2	3	3.00	3.01	0.68
#3	4	4.00	4.36	0.73
#4	6	6.00	5.76	0.58
#5	3	3.00	3.07	0.65
#6	2	2.00	2.02	0.74
#7	5	5.00	5.15	0.64
#8	1	2.00	1.77	0.70
#9	4	4.00	4.36	0.71
#10	2	2.00	2.11	0.58

Descriptive Statistics for Example Compositions (N = 168)

Note. Ratings were based on a six-point scale: 1 = *Very Easy* to 6 = *Very Difficult.*

Open-Ended Questions and Grading Rationales

An open-ended question asking why the participant selected the particular grade level followed the rating exercise for each composition. I collected a varying number of non-responses or unusable ones, which caused a variance in total respondents from composition to composition. Through content analysis, data were collected in a spreadsheet, and common themes were coded by these criteria: rhythm complexity, tessitura, part independence, wind instrumentation, key signature, musical density, percussion instrumentation, tempo, articulations, time signature, cross-cueing, and composition length. Coding was reviewed by a qualified external reviewer who provided a reliability check. As I analyzed the responses, I was able to see emerging themes and a common thread to support why participants selected each grade level. I reviewed all written responses and chose the most in-depth, well-read, responses for each criterion and listed it within the analysis below.

Table 24 displays the frequency counts for the category ratings derived from the open-ended responses explaining respondents' rationale for grade level choice concerning Composition #1, *Conviction*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (76.7%), tessitura (73.0%), and part independence (55.8%).

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, time signature, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

The piece has simple components such as a simple time signature, an easy key signature, and easy rhythms. The ranges for each instrument are manageable for middle school students. There are not any exposed solos, and the instrumentation

is reduced with only two voice parts. Rhythms and articulations are repetitive. Students are not asked for a large dynamic range. The percussion instruments are typical for a grade 1 piece. The tempo marking of 144, combined with simple syncopation, inclines me to place this above a grade 1 piece of music.

The following response had to do with accessibility as related to rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, time signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

Fast tempo, but relatively simple rhythmic ideas, mostly stepwise motion for wind players, largest interval is a third, except for low brass. Familiar key and time signature for young players/middle schoolers. Simple rhythms for percussionists, no rolls or 'more advanced' technical requirements for snare drummer. Parts are not very independent; sections of dense scoring are mixed with sections that are more sparse. Articulations should all be familiar for middle schoolers. Table 24

Category	п	%
Rhythm Complexity	125	76.7
Tessitura	119	73.0
Part Independence	91	55.8
Wind Instrumentation	65	39.9
Key Signature	37	22.7
Musical Density	26	16.0
Percussion Instrumentation	23	14.1
Tempo	20	12.3
Articulations	18	11.0
Time Signature	5	3.1
Cross-Cueing	4	2.5
Composition Length	1	0.6

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #1, *Conviction* (N = 163)

Table 25 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #2, *Ballade*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (66.9%), part independence (64.4%), and tessitura (41.7%).

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, time signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, and tessitura:

While the key and meter are simple, there are a few elements that make this piece

a grade 3. The expanded instrumentation, including a larger percussion book, makes this piece moderately difficult. The expectations for a lyrical style, combined with syncopation, could be difficult for beginning students. Divisi is present in some parts, and rhythms do not line up. Performers are expected to manipulate tempo. Tessitura is typical of a grade 2 composition.

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, wind instrumentation, part independence, tessitura, and articulations:

Exposed parts, requirements of control/tone/intonation due to tempo, independent parts/movement/rhythm, must have good baritone or tenor sax to play; one part lies exclusively with them (and alto clarinet, but who uses that now?). Range is within range of a grade 2 but would need grade 3 level players to make it sound good because of intonation, tone quality, and breath support requirements, rhythmic independence.

Category	п	%
Rhythm Complexity	109	66.9
Part Independence	105	64.4
Tessitura	68	41.7
Wind Instrumentation	63	38.7
Musical Density	44	27.0
Tempo	40	24.5
Percussion Instrumentation	35	21.5

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #2, Ballade (N = 163)

Articulations	35	21.5
Key Signature	18	11.0
Cross-Cueing	8	4.9
Time Signature	1	0.6
Composition Length	0	0.0

Table 26 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #3, *Africa: Ceremony, Song and Ritual.* The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (71.9%), tessitura (54.5%), and wind instrumentation (52.7%). The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, time signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, tessitura, and articulations:

The meter is simple, but there is a key signature change in the piece. The tempo is listed at 88, making all rhythms playable by a high school-aged musician. Woodwinds have a solid rhythmic demand. Horn has extended techniques, and upper woodwinds are required to tremolo. Sforzando articulations are present, and overall, the dynamics are quite loud. Percussion usage is extensive and largely independent. High brass ranges are extended.

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, key signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, and part independence:

Technical demand of woodwinds' leading into 14 usually indicates either a strong 3 or 4. That expectation of dexterity, even at 88 bpm [beats per minute], is a benchmark I usually see that clarifies the potential of a 4. That, combined with the unison nature of syncopated rhythms within the percussion section and the expectation of nearly tutti alignment of the winds in m6, m9 and m10, are a challenge. The effects of the horns and the depth of percussion assignments add to the difficulty. Fortunately, although there are unison 16th passages, they are thematic in configuration and could be taught to the entire ensemble without requiring complete part independence. A resolution to a modal setup (even though it's just going to lean into Dorian/C minor) in m14 is usually another indicator that we're looking at something that is either a strong 3 or 4. Putting the new key as printed in Bb and not C minor saves the "scaries" of an Ab for younger players and will probably just be printed in later on, rather than put in the key signature.

Category	п	%
Rhythm Complexity	120	71.9
Tessitura	91	54.5
Wind Instrumentation	88	52.7
Percussion Instrumentation	73	43.7
Articulations	48	28.7
Part Independence	45	26.9
Key Signature	31	18.6
Musical Density	27	16.2
Tempo	11	6.6
Composition Length	6	3.6
Time Signature	4	2.4

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #3, Africa: Ceremony, Song and Ritual (N = 167)

0

Table 27 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #4, *Circus Maximus*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (62.2%), wind instrumentation (57.1%), and percussion instrumentation (43.6%).

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, time signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

The omission of pulse in the beginning of the piece is a technique not typical of easier compositions. Rhythmic demand is high for performers. Most instrument ranges are extended (especially low horn). Ornamentation is required for some performers. Solo/soli moments are largely independent. Overall dynamics are rather loud. Percussion usage may get extensive. There are multiple meter changes.

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, time signature, key signature, wind instrumentation, part independence, tessitura, and articulations:

Time signature changes, accidentals, challenging 16th-note rhythms, part independence, trills, ornamentations, style markings, range (pedal tones, horns playing in bass clef). The use of time in seconds as an indicator for measures seen at the beginning is something seen in much more challenging music. The jumps in range on instruments require players to have lots of control and flexibility while also playing quickly and consistently. This piece requires a large knowledge of

music and techniques on individual instruments that would be best known through

time and experience as a player.

Table 27

Frequencies:	Category	Ratings	Explaining	Grade	Level for	Composition	#4,	Circus
Maximus (N =	= 156)							

Category	n	%
Rhythm Complexity	97	62.2
Wind Instrumentation	89	57.1
Percussion Instrumentation	68	43.6
Part Independence	53	34.0
Tessitura	47	30.1
Time Signature	42	26.9
Articulations	39	25.0
Musical Density	37	23.7
Key Signature	18	11.5
Tempo	17	10.9
Composition Length	0	0.0
Cross-Cueing	0	0.0

Table 28 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #5, *Ghost Fleet*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (60.0%), tessitura (53.9%), and part independence (52.1%).

The following is a response for composition length, rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, and articulations:

Key of Bb; slower tempo—control and quality tone needed; some rhythmic layering, but not too difficult; some exposed sections; dynamics—*mp-f*; 3 trumpet and trombone parts; this could be a grade 4 based on overall length of piece, the addition of a faster section, how complicated the percussion parts are (list of instruments is extensive), and use of alto clarinet (even though part is doubled).

An example of a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations was:

articulations was.

This piece contains many moments where tempo changed. There is a key signature change. Scoring offers 3-5 voices at a time, with some contrapuntal movement. The percussion list on the first page suggests large percussion usage. Flute is asked to solo. Tempo is manageable. Rhythms include syncopation and dotted eighth/sixteenths. Ranges are slightly extended. Dynamics range from *mp* to *f*.

Category	п	%
Rhythm Complexity	99	60.0
Tessitura	89	53.9
Part Independence	86	52.1

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #5, *Ghost Fleet* (N = 156)

Wind Instrumentation	71	43.0
Tempo	50	30.3
Key Signature	43	26.1
Percussion Instrumentation	37	22.4
Musical Density	33	20.0
Articulations	18	10.9
Composition Length	3	1.8
Time Signature	3	1.8
Cross-Cueing	2	1.2

Table 29 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the openended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #6, *In a French Garden*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (52.5%), tessitura (47.5%), and part independence (45.0%).

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, time signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

The meter plus the tempo marking would most likely place this piece in one creating a slight demand. The key signature does not change and is manageable. Rhythms are generic with slight syncopation. Outside of slurs into staccato, articulations are manageable. Flute is asked to solo. Ranges are manageable. Percussion usage is not extensive. Scoring includes up to three parts with some exposed solis. The following is a response for rhythm complexity, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

Part splits are there, but for harmonic purposes not necessarily creating lineindependence. Ranges are comparable to beginning band, staying in the staff or below (demonstrated best by the trumpet ranges). Percussion parts are minimal, keeping students on basic/standard instruments, with no timpani-tuning changes. Rhythmic difficulty is commensurate with a beginning band program utilizing primarily quarter and half-notes, dotted-half notes, and scarce well-placed eighth notes. Articulations are basic, and the piece has very manageable phrase lengths.

Category	n	%
Rhythm Complexity	84	52.5
Tessitura	76	47.5
Part Independence	72	45.0
Tempo	56	35.0
Wind Instrumentation	55	34.4
Key Signature	54	33.8
Time Signature	31	19.4
Percussion Instrumentation	26	16.3
Musical Density	21	13.1
Articulations	21	13.1
Composition Length	1	0.6

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #6, In a French Garden (N = 156)

Table 30 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #7, *Invictus*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (74.4%), part independence (66.5%), and wind instrumentation (55.5%).

The following is a response for composition length, rhythm complexity, tempo, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

Extreme tessitura (flute—low C) and all three clarinet parts above the break; slow tempo and *pp* dynamics require control and quality of tone; exposed parts and several solo entrances; challenging mallet percussion; polyrhythm (sextuplets over 16ths and 32nds); two bassoon parts, three trombone parts plus bar/euph, and four horn parts; this piece could be grade 6, depending on length, and if there is a faster section.

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, time signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, cross-cueing, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

This is probably "Difficult." It's probably a 5, because of several factors, not the least of which is numerous split parts (including three oboes) and the addition of Soprano Saxophone. However, the cross-cues help more ensembles perform the piece if the needed personnel are not available. There is some rhythmic complexity, and the most difficult aspect seems to be the passing of a primary motive between soloists. Independence not only in playing (soloists being

confident with strong listening skills) but also in the rest of the ensemble to keep track of where they are is important. Percussion parts are primarily gestural and f or color, which would require strong independence and sensitivity on the instruments. The trombone range does extend higher than average as well.

Table 30

Category	п	0⁄0
Rhythm Complexity	122	74.4
Part Independence	109	66.5
Wind Instrumentation	91	55.5
Percussion Instrumentation	69	42.1
Tessitura	60	36.6
Key Signature	31	18.9
Musical Density	21	12.8
Tempo	14	8.5
Articulations	11	6.7
Cross-Cueing	10	6.1
Time Signature	9	5.5
Composition Length	6	3.7

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #7, Invictus (N = 164)

Table 31 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #8, *Corps of Discovery*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (77.0%), tessitura (58.2%), and part independence (48.5%).

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

There is limited range; melodic line is mostly steps/harmonies in thirds; repetitive ostinato-like rhythms; doubling of parts; only two clarinet and trumpet parts; variety of percussion parts with extra part for advanced players; articulations minimal; dynamic range *p-f;* block scoring.

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, time signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, and tessitura:

Simple time signature paired with a simple key signature. Tempo is manageable. Note values are simple. Dynamic range is moderate. Percussion usage offers a chance for advanced percussion, but is not extensive. Scoring offers three voices at most at a time. Ranges are manageable. Clarinets and trumpets do have split parts.

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #8, Corps of Discovery (N = 165)

Category	n	%
Rhythm Complexity	127	77.0
Tessitura	96	58.2
Part Independence	80	48.5
Percussion Instrumentation	69	41.8
Wind Instrumentation	57	34.5

Key Signature	47	28.5
Tempo	35	21.2
Musical Density	15	9.1
Articulations	15	9.1
Time Signature	5	3.0
Composition Length	2	1.2
Cross-Cueing	2	1.2

Table 32 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #9, *Pablo!*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (72.2%), time signature (58.0%), and wind instrumentation (44.4%).

The following is a response composition length, rhythm complexity, key signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, and musical density:

Key of F; several accidentals; arpeggios and scale patterns in 16th notes; two oboe, three clarinet, three trumpet, and three trombone parts different from bar/euph; layered rhythms and exposed low brass; percussion parts shown aren't too difficult, but instruments required are extensive; could be grade 5, depending on overall length and inclusion of faster section.

The following is a response tempo, key signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

The texture is thicker; interdependent percussion parts; brisk tempo with light articulations; accidentals; hemiola; quick passages in woodwind parts; ranges are not too terribly high, but they have some upper-range passages in the first parts and in horn and saxophone counter-melody.

Table 32

Category	п	%
Rhythm Complexity	117	72.2
Time Signature	94	58.0
Wind Instrumentation	72	44.4
Tessitura	65	40.1
Part Independence	64	39.5
Percussion Instrumentation	44	27.2
Key Signature	33	20.4
Tempo	32	19.8
Musical Density	13	8.0
Articulations	9	5.6
Composition Length	4	2.5
Cross-Cueing	0	0.0

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #9, Pablo! (N = 162)

Table 33 displays the frequency counts for the qualitative category ratings for the open-ended responses explaining the respondents' chosen grade level for Composition #10, *Contempo*. The most frequently mentioned categories were rhythm complexity (65.2%), tessitura (55.3%), and wind instrumentation (36.6%).

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, tempo, key signature, wind instrumentation, percussion instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

Key of Eb; tempo—fast but reasonable; articulations written in; doubling of parts; percussion requirements doable—rhythmically as well as instrumentally needed; only two clarinet and two trumpet parts; tessitura—about an octave; some thin scoring (trumpets and percussion at m17) but no solos.

The following is a response for rhythm complexity, time signature, wind instrumentation, part independence, musical density, tessitura, and articulations:

Three-part texture throughout, with some variation in dynamic markings and articulations; straightforward rhythms in odd meter (3/4), with some limited sixteenth-note rhythms in the snare drum part; first clarinet part crosses the break stepwise once (A-Bb-C) but generally otherwise remains above or below the break, for each phrase's second clarinet part does not cross the break; ranges are generally limited to one and a half octaves or one octave.

Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #10, Contempo (N = 161)

Category	n	%
Rhythm Complexity	105	65.2
Tessitura	89	55.3
Wind Instrumentation	59	36.6
Percussion Instrumentation	51	31.7
Part Independence	50	31.1

Tempo	42	26.1
Key Signature	40	24.8
Articulations	38	23.6
Time Signature	27	16.8
Musical Density	13	8.1
Composition Length	1	0.6
Cross-Cueing	0	0.0

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify areas of agreement and disagreement between concert band music publishers' difficulty grading systems and the perceptions of the band directors who program concert band music. I addressed the following research questions: (a) Does a discrepancy exist between performance difficulty levels assigned to literature through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' perceptions of this music's difficulty level? (b) What criteria do concert band directors use to select music for their ensembles that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level?

Because no standard difficulty stratification for concert band music exists among publishers, band directors must rely on personal interpretations of diverse grading systems. Therefore, most publishers' concert band literature is currently graded using global rating systems (Saville, 1991), which averages complex individual problems and requirements into categories that are often subjective and vague by their right decision. This can be a source of confusion for band directors when selecting level appropriate literature for their students. In this study, I found that band directors' perceptions of difficulty levels assigned to concert band music is higher (or perceived as more difficult) compared to concert band music publisher ratings.

In this chapter, I will address these questions as they relate to the results of the data analysis. The first section will be the interpretation of the findings, which will be framed by the previous literature and organized around the two research questions. The second section focuses on the implication of the findings to music teachers, followed by

the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the overall significance of the findings.

Interpretation of the Findings and Relationship to the Literature

An essential task of music educators and directors is the selection of repertoire appropriate for their students' musical development and technical growth (Watson, 2013). The current music grading system, lacks a discriminating method for selecting appropriate music for individual ensembles. Global ratings do not accurately indicate a piece's actual individual difficulties; they give only a generalized impression of a composition's difficulty. Thus the matching of individual performance competencies with the difficulty of the individual parts will ultimately determine any composition's accessibility. Global ratings do not accurately indicate the individual difficulties of the various instruments within each composition based on music directors' experiences.

One of the significant challenges concert band directors encounter is selecting high quality, difficulty-level appropriate repertoire that matches the musical and technical levels of their ensembles. Thoughtful repertoire selection can lead to increased student motivation and performance quality, and ultimately, add excitement for music making. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is the optimal area of learning where all educators want their students to reside because it is where the instruction is most beneficial for the student (Audley, 2018). Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory is the optimal psychological state that people experience when engaged in an activity that is appropriately challenging to one's skill level, commonly referred as "being in the zone" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). These theories are essential theoretical frameworks for considering how directors' repertoire choices can affect students'

motivation and continued participation. Instructional scaffolding is a useful complement to flow theory because it demonstrates the music teacher's role in generating flow states. This is because ZPD's social construct establishes a framework for students to achieve a flow state through outside guidance.

Challenges in selecting appropriate music for individual ensembles are magnified by the profusion of music lists available to music educators. The band repertoire has grown so large that no one person can be familiar with it in its entirety. Kirchhoff (2010), stated than more than 1,000 new band music titles enter the marketplace annually. Byo (1988) asserted that the copious amounts of published musical material for wind band often renders repertoire selection challenging, perhaps even overwhelming, for instrumental music educators when they must make crucial musical selection decisions. This problem is even more acute with the novice teacher, whose knowledge of band literature is limited. Band directors need an individualized, objective rating system that enables them the ability to match the strengths and weaknesses of their ensembles with the musical requirements of compositions. In the next sub-sections, I will interpret the findings that were generated to answer the two research questions in the context of existing literature.

Survey

The survey had three sections: (a) demographics, (b) perceptions, and (c) perceived concert band grading recommendations. Demographic questions consisted of the following questions: (a) What is your current position? (b) How long have you been teaching? (c) What is your highest degree you have earned? and (d) What level do you teach? The results from the demographics segment determined most were band directors

(83.3%), with 11 years or more of experience (70.2%), having earned a Master's Degree (64.9%), and were mainly middle school band directors (46.3%), and high school directors (52.1%). Participants from 27 states took the survey, but I did not seek to discern any correlation between geographical location and band directors' perceptions. Participants were also asked what their primary instruments were. Most were trumpet players (19.6%) and percussionists, followed closely by clarinet and saxophone players.

Perceptions

This section in the survey dealt with participants' overall perceptions of how they select concert band repertoire and their opinions on how concert band music publishers' rate and rank the difficulty level of their selected music. Throughout this section, grade level ratings referred to the performance difficulty as assigned by the publisher had assigned to compositions that the participants had selected for their respective ensembles. Research Question 1 Interpretation

For the first research question, I pinpointed any discrepancy between performance difficulty levels assigned to literature through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' perceptions of the difficulty level of this music. Throughout this section, grade level ratings referred to the performance difficulty the publisher had assigned to particular pieces. The results suggest that band directors believe a discrepancy exists between their perceptions of the performance difficulty levels of this music and the difficulty levels assigned through publishers' grading systems. Participants indicated that publishers rate pieces somewhat easier than band directors do. This perception was later confirmed in the participants' ratings of difficulty within the 10 excerpts.

This discrepancy aligns with scholarly conclusions in the previous literature, specifically the study of Saville (1991), who found a significant disparity between the number of grading levels employed in the rating systems and the lack of consistent format that contributes to this variability. Moreover, some rating systems use letters, and others use numbers, which partially explains the lack of uniformity among major music publishers' rating systems. For instance, one publishing company's Grade 3 may be equivalent to another's Grade 2.

Because no definitive core repertoire of musical works for concert band exists, those in the profession tend to quantify and qualify extant literature by those in the profession. As a result, many band repertoire lists have emerged over the years. The most influential sources of repertoire for young bands are contest music lists published by state music organizations (Harris & Walls, 1996). These lists are influential because they are the most widely used, and they often represent young bands' first introductions into extensive practice and training (Harris & Walls, 1996). Unfortunately, the lack of a definitive core repertoire of musical works for concert band has also caused the global rating systems to vary widely from state to state, with little agreement among them as to the number of grading levels, or the criteria upon which each level is based (Beckwith; 2018; Stevenson, 2003; Wareham, 1967).

Directly supporting the current research study's findings, Saville (1991) also found that publishers tend to rate their music lower than band directors' perceptions. For instance, in a study of graded band music lists, which were based on the same number of grade levels, only 30% of the entries agreed among lists, whereas 17% of the entries varied by two or more grade levels among lists. Many of the participants in Saville's

study claimed that graded band music lists assigned the same musical composition to two or more different rating levels on the same list, and that the criteria for the assignment of grading levels were subjective.

In an earlier study supporting the lack of discrepancy in the perception of difficulty between publisher and music directors, Wareham (1967) found an agreement of less than 9% among three major music lists containing 800 individual titles. Participants indicated that their respective states did have a prescribed music list (79%), but 21% did not know whether or not their states had prescribed music lists.

Rater variability in assessing music performance, however, appears common, as previous findings in the literature highlighted. For instance, Wesolowski, Wind, and Engelhard (2016) found that raters' perceptions of severity, difficulty, and rating scale vary significantly. This is consistent with the current study, indicating the problem of rating difficulty in band compositions between publishers and music educators.

In conclusion, these findings of the current study provide further evidence of a discrepancy in the ratings of difficulty of musical pieces between publishers and music educators, suggesting a lack of standardization among the rating systems. This problem appears to have persisted for some time, given the scope of older and recent research studies indicating such discrepancies (Saville, 1991; Wesolowski et al., 2016). Research Question 2 Interpretation

Music directors must make decisions about the repertoire of their band (Dziuk, 2018). The open-ended questionnaire phase of the study was focused on answering the second research question: What criteria do instrumental music educators use to select music for their ensembles that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level? The

results of the content analysis revealed that part independence, rhythm complexity, tessitura, and wind and percussion instrumentation were music educators' main criteria for selecting music at an appropriate performance difficulty level for their ensembles. Participants in this study have more variations in their ratings than anticipated, which caused a more significant standard deviation than expected. Cross-cueing seemed to draw the largest number of varied opinions.

Participants reviewed 10 previously published and graded concert band compositions. A review of the mean difficulty level of their replies indicated band directors rank pieces harder than the publishers' do. The only piece that was ranked slightly below the publisher rating was John Corigliano's "Circus Maximus," which its publisher rated as Grade 6. The participants rated it as 5.76 with a standard deviation of .58, likely because it was a short excerpt of the entire composition, and participants stated in their narratives that, had they viewed the entire 45-minute composition, they would agree that composition length alone could influence the perceived grade level.

Previous studies have shown that musical elements are vital considerations in the repertoire selection of music teachers (Hedden & Allen, 2019). The findings of the current study affirm the important role of musical elements in educators' decision-making processes. This study's unique contribution is the identification of the essential specific music elements that inform band directors' repertoire selections, including rhythm complexity, tessitura, and part independence.

I identified rhythm complexity as one of the most widely used criterion in music selection. This is consistent with the past literature indicating the general technical demands and difficulty of rhythm in a musical ensemble, highlighting the role of rhythm

complexity in the possible considerations of music directors when selecting music for their students (Millican, 2019). Hence, critical assessment of learners must be entirely accurate to their levels, neither too easy nor too complicated for them to achieve optimal learning (Sarker, 2019).

Band directors consider tessitura (instrument range) as an essential criterion when selecting grade-level appropriate repertoire. Nearly all participants (98%) consider tessitura (instrument range) to be an essential criterion in their selection of grade-level appropriate repertoire: 50% stated that trumpet tessitura is extremely important, 28% emphasized clarinet and horn tessitura, and 26% emphasized low brass tessitura. Flute and double reeds tessitura considerations were considered moderately important, and percussion tessitura was not considered important at all. This is a particularly unique finding, as previous research has identified the general category of musical elements as a factor in band directors' musical selection processes (Hedden & Allen, 2019), without providing data on which specific musical elements are particularly influential.

Part independence also emerged as a critical music selection criterion, and it was identified previously as one of the most important technical considerations in selecting band repertoire (Watson, 2013). This current study thus corroborates earlier research in terms of upholding the important role of part independence in the selection evaluation of music educators/directors.

Wind and percussion instrumentation is closely related to part independence, insofar as the number of individual parts determines the level of individual player autonomy. Generally, the more individual parts within a section, the more difficult a piece will be. This would include whether there is a single part or multiple parts per

instrument (e.g., Clarinet 1, 2, 3, Trumpet 1, 2, 3, etc.). Additionally, unique instrument requirements such as English horn, Eb clarinet, soprano saxophone, and flugelhorn that introduce specialized playing techniques and challenges can increase the amount of rehearsal time needed to prepare the work to the expectations of a performance (Millican, 2019). Careful consideration must be used when reviewing how many percussion parts are listed in the score versus how many percussionists are available to play. Not having crucial, important percussion parts or solos will affect the ensemble's overall performance.

Participants identified part independence, rhythm complexity, tessitura, and wind and percussion instrumentation as the main criteria for appropriate performance level ensemble music selection. This finding uniquely specifies the selection criteria in ways that previous studies on the decision-making criteria of music directors did not, as they focused more on psychological factors in music selection (Hedden & Allen, 2019).

Implications for Music Educators

Less experienced music teachers and directors do not yet possess the skills to determine appropriate repertoire for their students (Forrester, 2017), which underscores the importance of publisher guides for the level of difficulty of musical pieces (Dziuk, 2018). Findings from the current study imply that publisher ratings may not be the most effective resource for novice educators in determining repertoire for their students, given the discrepancy in the prescribed difficulty rating and the actual experiences of music educators/directors.

There is an obvious need for an industry-wide standard for band music difficulty, in the form of a more standardized rating system that reflects consistency and agreement
between music educators and music publishers. This would benefit all music educators, regardless of their experience level. Because concert band directors are tasked with selecting their bands' repertoire (Dziuk, 2018), such an industry-wide standard would ease the decision-making process of music educators, particularly novice or less experienced ones.

The current study's results present valuable data on musical elements and criteria that can be used to identify level-appropriate repertoire. While there is not a uniform difficulty grading system where all unanimously agree, there are approaches where the topic can be addressed with teachers. Chen (2016) asserted that none of the participants in her study received useful guidance about repertoire selection during their undergraduate study, and they chose pieces based solely on their experiences. Sheldon (1996) suggested that selecting repertoire effectively for students should be incorporated "in the undergraduate music education curriculum" (p. 6). Often undergraduate methods and conducting classes focus on selecting high-quality literature but fail to match it to student ability levels. As a result, undergraduate training must thoroughly examine repertoire selection, which must include matching repertoire difficulty level to student abilities. Educators could use the results of this study to focus on the top three criteria—rhythm complexity, tessitura, part independence—to assist novice band directors in their repertoire selection.

Resources such as publisher websites that show grade leveling criteria and the American Band College Music Grading Chart (2000) are excellent resources for directors of all skill and experience levels. Sheldon (1996) suggested that the rhythmic complexity and motives of an ensemble selection should place the rhythmic patterns studied in the

students' lessons into a musical context. Directors should thereby incorporate rhythmic reading and comprehension within their lessons to foster higher levels of music reading.

Tessitura awareness, as it relates to student progress, is imperative in musical selection. A small number of publishers lists suggested ranges for each grade level on their websites. Understanding part independence can be challenging to assess. Part independence is essential to consider when assessing the difficulty level of a composition (Watson, 2013). The more independent lines a piece of music has, the more challenging it will be for less mature players to perform.

Wind and percussion instrumentation can affect instruction and ensemble performance quality. A composition with a single instrumental line can reinforce a weaker section, while one with multiple parts is significantly more challenging. Band directors must assess the number of written percussion parts versus the number of actual percussionists because omitted percussion parts could cause ensemble performance issues. Publishers offer arrangements that utilize so-called "flexible instrumentation," where musical lines can be performed and doubled in various combinations of instruments depending on the strength of the ensemble (Millican, 2019). This instrumentation is useful for bands that have limited instrumentation and overall members.

College professors should seek to include these resources, as well as this study's results, into their undergraduate curricula. Professors can facilitate the responsible selection of music through awareness of influences on their students during their undergraduate years. Pre-service and novice teachers often lack exposure to all difficulty levels of music and often refer to their mentors for repertoire suggestions and selection. It

is beneficial that directors of all levels of experience network with friends and colleagues (Reynolds, 2000). All instrumental music educators should encourage their professors, mentor instructors, or colleagues to evaluate with more objective criteria.

All musical elements incorporated in concert band repertoire and criteria mentioned in this study should be subject to consideration when deciding upon difficulty appropriateness. If music teacher educators help pre-service teachers develop the ability to analyze literature towards a greater understanding of identifying difficulty appropriateness, they will make better choices in repertoire selection and instruction once in the profession and, therefore, will raise the probability of enhancing students' musical experiences. Additionally, if publishers and concert band directors implement the results from this study, repertoire selection could then match student ability levels more carefully.

Previous studies on music educators' decision-making process in determining appropriate ensemble repertoire were based primarily on psychological considerations (Adams, 2019; Chen, 2018), whereas the current study focused on the more technical aspects of this decision-making process. Therefore, its findings can help novice educators in their own selection process. More specifically, music educators should be able to focus on assessing rhythm complexity, tessitura, and part independence, which reflect the current findings about the importance of these three music elements.

Limitations of this Research

First, the study focused solely on the potential discrepancy between participant and publisher assessments of a piece's difficulty level. By not including information on

state list-provided assessments, the study could not determine whether state ratings affected either participant or publisher assessments.

Second, the use of a national sample could not pinpoint any state or regionspecific trends in difficulty assessment. For instance, participant assessments may have differed most from publisher assessments in areas where state and publisher assessments also significantly differed. Those potential interactions were unidentifiable. However, this limitation was deemed acceptable for the current study based on its exploratory nature.

Third, the study did not include the practice of concert band music publishers who sometimes grade music on half-levels (e.g., 1.5, 2.5, 3.5). The study used only whole levels to help participants differentiate one level from the next, to ameliorate potential confusion among the levels, and to require participants to discern exact difficulty levels within the survey. This practice mirrored Likert-type scale strategies that force choices among whole numbers. Research lacks in this area, and this study provided a foundation for future studies examining these methods of distinguishing among difficulty levels.

Fourth, the study did not explore the possible effect of variances in participants' comprehension of the items in the instruments. For instance, the overall median score for "My perception of grade-level ratings is mostly the same as publishers" indicated that the participants disagreed with the publishers' assigned level of difficulty. "My perception of grade-level ratings is mostly different from the publishers' " presented a different perspective on how directors perceive publishers' difficulty level assignments. This question could have potentially confused some of the participants, because 35.5% of them disagreed with the question, while 34.3% said they disagreed with the publishers'

assigned level of difficulty. Both answers are relatively close within responses and could be attributed to the particular phrasing or wording of these questions.

Fifth, because only short excerpts of the full compositions were used, participants did not have an effective method or perspective to assess if composition length was a factor in determining appropriate grade level difficulty. Composition form and structure are factors in determining overall difficulty (Millican, 2019). Longer compositions can be demanding—both mentally and physically—for all players. Endurance is another aspect related to composition length in more extended and slower compositions. Multiple-movement works can be complicated, given that it may require more rehearsal time to learn more diverse styles, concepts, and the relative complexity of each of the individual movements.

A final limitation of these findings pertains to the materials selected for this study. The selection of difficulty assessment excerpts was limited to only 10 difficulty assessment excerpts from three concert band publishers. Furthermore, the use of a wholenumber scale forced a generalization of difficulty level across all written pieces rated by the instrumental music publishers from a small selection of items.

Suggestions for Future Research

My findings raise several questions for future research. A similar survey using full-band compositions instead of excerpts may partially account for nuances in the ratings and perceptions of music educators, insofar as duration and composition development are important factors in music selection. Even though participants in this study ranked composition length as one of the least important factors in grade-levelappropriate repertoire selection, it is a real consideration in program development and, as

such, should be reviewed. There is a possibility that if full compositions were used, it could allow the participant to determine whether composition length is an essential factor in determining the overall difficulty level because of additional rehearsal time needed for learning the piece.

Research on the effect of composition length relating to difficulty is scant. Sheldon (1996) maintained that teachers must be reminded that younger players lack the stamina and attention spans to perform longer works, and performing several shorter works permits repertoire variety. Band composers are given guidelines by the publishers indicating the duration and number of measures allowed in a composition. Music publisher C. L. Barnhouse Co. states that music submissions to that publisher for publication consideration must be reasonable to the grade levels and programming uses of the submitted pieces. For instance, a seven-minute Grade 2 piece or a one-and-a-halfminute Grade 4 contest piece would eliminate most sales (Barnhouse, n.d.).

Relatively few publishers visibly provide their difficulty-grading criteria; hence only three publishers were used in this study. Additionally, publishers often list their band compositions in grade-level categories, leading the consumer to purchase the composition based solely on the publisher's grade level recommendation. Expanding the number of publishers in future research, regardless of their visible grade leveling criteria, could provide a broader diversity of compositions, hence more accurate results from a more extensive morass of data.

The scope of the current study might also be expanded in terms of geographic characteristics and type of repertoire. Future research could focus on the use of state and regional lists to determine which compositions to use in order to determine geographical

trends. Beckwith (2018) and Stevenson (2003) examined the issues between these state lists, noting that a piece such as Frank Ticheli's arrangement of "Amazing Grace" was ranked according to different grade levels among the Florida, Indiana, and Texas state music lists. Furthermore, state-prescribed music lists use different grade-leveling systems; Alabama and Ohio use seven levels; Arkansas, California, Florida, Maryland, and New York use six levels; Idaho, Louisiana, Oregon, and Texas use five levels; Wisconsin uses four levels; and Minnesota uses three levels (Stevenson, 2003). Disparities such as these only serve to exacerbate the challenge of literature selection; with such a lack of universality, additional study may provide greater clarity, particularly for less experienced band directors who are only just beginning to develop curricular repertoire decision-making skills.

Similar challenges may also exist in the selection of orchestral music. Future research should extend to string and full orchestra repertoire to determine any correlation between band and orchestra directors' perceptions of difficulty and concert band and orchestra publishers' assessments of difficulty.

Increasing the number of study participants may enhance the validity and reliability of the results. The population for this study was limited to certified music teachers who have taught and conducted band music and was focused solely on concert band repertoire. Enlarging the population to encompass anyone who may teach band instruments in any capacity could ensure the reliability and validity of the results. By using a larger population frame, more people would become aware of how to assess the difficulty of repertoire and be more conscious of the importance of matching technical characteristics of repertoire to students' capabilities.

Ten total open-ended questions were used and provided a tremendous amount of vital data. While additional open-ended questions could be added to allow participants to expand on their responses, a balance must be struck between the desire to collect pertinent information and posing a task that is too time-intensive or onerous for the prospective participant.

This study involved the perceptions of in-service teachers (band directors). A similar study involving undergraduate pre-service teachers could be conducted to determine degrees of agreement with experienced educators. Once the students enter the music profession, an additional study could explore whether and how their perceptions change, asking the question: "Does the reality of public-school teaching change your thoughts about selecting grade-appropriate repertoire?"

Another future study could determine whether a difference in the perceptions of difficulty relative to the socioeconomic status (SES) of music students exists. Perrine (2016) examined Florida public schools with higher percentages of minority students who were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch programs. He discovered that students in those schools are less likely to participate in large group ensemble concert band festivals. Composite festival scores were higher in schools with larger band sizes and lower percentages of minority students and bands from schools with lower enrollment and higher percentages of students on free and reduced-price lunch, and bands from schools with small band programs tended to perform less difficult literature. It appears that the concerns of repertoire difficulty may have a connection to SES, which is, therefore, related to curriculum equity.

A question within the survey asked, "What is your primary instrument?" The findings indicated no correlation between participants' primary instrument and if this influenced which instruments' tessitura were essential related to difficulty. The results also revealed that the primary instrument did not affect tessitura selection. Future researchers could look closer to determine whether there is a connection between the participant's primary instrument and tessitura analysis bias.

Choosing appropriate repertoire is one of the most critical decisions music teachers have to make (Dziuk, 2018; Watson, 2013). By customizing the matching of repertoire to each student's particular capabilities, the repertoire selection process can become more precise and accurate. The more precision with which repertoire is matched to students' needs and capabilities, the more it will benefit their musical development. Hence, a recommendation for future research is to test the hypothesis that repertoire that is individually matched to each student's particular capabilities conduces to better learning outcomes.

Finally, future researchers could also expound on the finding of a discrepancy between performance difficulty levels assigned to repertoire through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' perceptions of this music's difficulty level. More specifically, future researchers could further examine why such discrepancies exist. They could conduct a more in-depth comparative analysis of the decision-making rationale for the difficulty ratings based on the perceptions of music directors and publishers.

Conclusions

In this study, certified music teachers who have taught and conducted band music reported discrepancies between concert band publisher difficulty grading systems and the

perceptions of the educators who program this music. Findings concerning the inconsistences among publisher, national, state, and regional graded music lists are supported by the research of Wareham (1967) and Saville (1991). More concerted efforts could eliminate this gap, such that difficulty ratings between publishers and music practitioners are in alignment.

Regarding the decision-making factors that influence the selection of repertoire among school band directors, the findings indicate that rhythm complexity, tessitura, and part independence were band directors' main criteria in selecting music at an appropriate performance difficulty level for their ensembles. Music teacher educators could assign better resources to help novice teachers interpret publishers' difficulty ratings. They could create resources to help novice teachers interpret publishers' difficulty ratings relative to the demands of a published score, particularly with regard to assessing their own abilities to identify rhythmic complexity, tessitura, and part independence demanded in repertoire. Through these resources, novice teachers could also guide/scaffold their students' achievement of those criteria; and reasonably predict the factors influencing their band members' abilities to achieve those, given access to appropriate instruction..

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL



Research Integrity & Compliance Student Faculty Center 3340 N. Broad Street, Suite 304 Philadelphia PA 19140 Institutional Review Board Phone: (215) 707-3390 Fax: (215) 707-9100 e-mail: irb@temple.edu



Approval for a Project Involving Human Subjects Research that Does Not Require Continuing Review

Date: 17-Sep-2019

Protocol Number:	25951
PI:	CONFREDO, DEBORAH
Review Type:	EXEMPT
Approved On:	17-Sep-2019
Committee:	A1
School/College:	BOYER COLLEGE OF MUSIC & DANCE (2200)
Department:	BOYER: MUSIC EDUCATION (22060)
Sponsor:	NO EXTERNAL SPONSOR
Project Title:	Criteria, Composition, And Compliance: Concert Band Directors' Perception of Concert Band Publisher Grading Systems

The IRB approved the protocol 25951.

The study was approved under Exempt or Expedited review. The IRB determined that the research <u>does not</u> <u>require a continuing review</u>, consequently there is not an IRB approval period.

If applicable to your study, you can access your IRB-approved, stamped consent document or consent script through ERA. Open the Attachments tab and open the stamped documents by clicking the Latest link next to each document. The stamped documents are labeled as such. Copies of the IRB approved stamped consent document or consent script must be used in obtaining consent.

Note that all applicable Institutional approvals must also be secured before study implementation. These approvals include, but are not limited to, Medical Radiation Committee ("MRC"); Radiation Safety Committee ("RSC"); Institutional Biosafety Committee ("IBC"); and Temple University Survey Coordinating Committee ("TUSCC"). Please visit these Committees' websites for further information.

Finally, in conducting this research, you are obligated to submit the following:

- Amendment requests All changes to the research must be reviewed and approved by the IRB. Changes requiring approval include, but are not limited to, changes in the design or focus of the research project, revisions to the information sheet for participants, addition of new measures or instruments, increasing the subject number, and changes to the research funding. Changes made to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects and implemented prior to IRB approval must be promptly reported to the IRB.
- **Reportable New Information** using the Reportable New Information e-form, report new information items such as those described in HRP 071 Policy Prompt Reporting Requirements to the IRB <u>within 5</u> <u>days</u>.
- **Closure report** using a closure e-form, submit when the study is permanently closed to enrollment; all subjects have completed all protocol related interventions and interactions; collection of private identifiable information is complete; and analysis of private identifiable information is complete.

For the complete list of investigator responsibilities, please see the HRP – 070 Policy – Investigator Obligations, the Investigator Manual (HRP-910), and other Policies and Procedures found on the Temple University IRB website: https://research.temple.edu/irb-forms-standard-operating-procedures.

Please contact the IRB at (215) 707-3390 if you have any questions.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Research:

Criteria, Composition, And Compliance: Concert Band Directors' Perception of Concert Band Publisher Grading Systems

Investigator and Department:

Dr. Deborah Confredo, Primary Investigator Professor, Department of Music Education and Therapy Mark Lortz, Student Investigator Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Music Education and Therapy

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?

You are invited to take part in a research study, because your experience as a band director or music administrator is highly valuable to the research questions being investigated.

What should I know about this research?

Someone will explain this research to you. Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide. All results are anonymous.

Who can I talk to about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, please contact the research team at: Presser Hall 2001 N. 13th Street Philadelphia, PA 19122 215-204-8301 <u>mlortz@temple.edu</u>

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team. You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?

This research is intended to identify possible discrepancies between concert band publisher grading systems and band director perceptions of concert band grade levels.

How long will I be in this research?

Your involvement in the research should last no longer than 15 minutes.

How many people will be studied?

Seventy-five-band directors or music administrators.

What happens if I agree to be in this research?

You will be asked to answer a survey regarding your selection process of selecting levelappropriate literature and evaluate excerpts of ten concert band compositions.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

You will be responsible for completing the survey in a timely fashion.

What happens if I say no, I do not want to be in this research?

You may decide not to take part in the research, and it will not be held against you. It will in no way affect your relationship with the researcher.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You agree to take part in the research. If you stop at any time, it will not be held against you. Participants will not be able to be able to withdraw from the study after completing their participation.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There will be no negative effects resulting from your participation. Your identity and your school's identity will remain confidential.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There will be no major benefits from your participation, other than the opportunity to reflect on your teaching and literature selection practices.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

All data collected will be kept by the researcher. While the results of the research study may be published, no identifiable personal information will be collected.

Can I be removed from the research without my permission?

No.

Your signature below indicates that:

Someone has explained this research study to you. You freely volunteer to be in this research study. You can choose not to take part in this research study and it will not affect your care. You can agree to take part in this study now and later change your mind. Your decision to leave the study will not affect your care.

You have been offered the opportunity to ask questions and all your questions have been answered.

Acceptance of Consent

Please check this box to indicate your acceptance of consent and proceed to the survey.

APPENDIX C

EMAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER

Hello:

I hope this email finds you well. As a Temple University Music Education doctoral candidate, I am conducting a research study to identify possible discrepancies between concert band publisher grading systems and band director perceptions of concert band grade levels. I am soliciting your participation in this study, which will entail an online survey exploring, examining, describing, and sharing your experiences, processes, and insights in selecting grade-level appropriate concert band literature. The expected duration of your participation in this research will be approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

If you are interested in participating, please click the link below (or copy and paste the URL into your browser) to provide informed consent and participate:

https://forms.gle/yHycmZkhR2mxboKP8

In an effort to obtain a large national sample size, please feel free to share this email with other colleagues. Thank you.

Sincerely, Mark Lortz mlortz@temple.edu

APPENDIX D

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT LETTER

My name is Mark Lortz. I am a Temple University Music Education doctoral candidate who is conducting a research study to identify possible discrepancies between concert band publisher grading systems and band director perceptions of concert band grade levels. I am soliciting your participation in this study, which will entail an online survey exploring, examining, describing, and sharing your experiences, processes, and insights in selecting grade-level appropriate concert band literature. The expected duration of your participation in this research will be approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

If you are interested in participating, please click the link below (or copy and paste the URL into your browser) to provide informed consent and participate:

https://forms.gle/yHycmZkhR2mxboKP8

At the conclusion of the survey, if you have any questions about the research, you are welcome to contact me at the email address provided below, or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Deborah Confredo (<u>DebConfredo@temple.edu</u>). In an effort to obtain a large national sample size, please feel free to share this email with other colleagues. This research has been approved by the Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Thank you.

Sincerely, Mark Lortz mlortz@temple.edu

APPENDIX E

INCLUSION CRITERIA AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Inclusion/Exclusion

Are you a music educator? Y/N

[If respondents selected N (No), they received the following message and were not

permitted to take the survey:

Thank you for completing this survey; your submission has been received. Please note, if you see this after answering "No" to the first teaching certification question, you are unable to complete this survey. A valid teaching certification is required.]

Demographic Information

What is your current position/job title?

- Band Director
- Administrator
- Supervisor
- Retired Music Educator
- Other

How many years have you taught?

- 1 year or less
- 2-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11 years or more

In what state do you teach?

• AL Alabama

- AK Alaska
- AZ Arizona
- AR Arkansas
- CA California
- CO Colorado
- CT Connecticut
- DE Delaware
- DC District of Columbia
- FL Florida
- GA Georgia
- HI Hawaii
- ID Idaho
- IL Illinois
- IN Indiana
- IA Iowa
- KS Kansas
- KY Kentucky
- LA Louisiana
- ME Maine
- MD Maryland
- MA Massachusetts
- MI Michigan
- MN Minnesota
- MS Mississippi
- MO Missouri

- MT Montana
- NE Nebraska
- NV Nevada
- NH New Hampshire
- NJ New Jersey
- NM New Mexico
- NY New York
- NC North Carolina
- ND North Dakota
- OH Ohio
- OK Oklahoma
- OR Oregon
- PA Pennsylvania
- RI Rhode Island
- SC South Carolina
- SD South Dakota
- TN Tennessee
- TX Texas
- UT Utah
- VT Vermont
- VA Virginia
- WA Washington
- WV West Virginia
- WI Wisconsin
- WY Wyoming

What is your highest completed degree?

- Bachelor's degree (e.g. BM, BA, BS)
- Master's degree (e.g. MM, MA, MS, MEd)
- Doctorate (e.g. Ph.D., D.M.A., Ed.D.)

Does your state have a prescribed graded music list?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

What grade level are you currently teaching? Check all that apply.

- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College/University
- Professional

What is your primary instrument?

- Flute
- Oboe
- Bassoon
- Clarinet
- Saxophone
- Trumpet
- Horn
- Trombone
- Baritone/Euphonium
- Tuba

- Percussion
- Strings
- Piano
- Vocal
- Other:
APPENDIX F

ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS: PERCEPTIONS

Please state your level of agreement with the following statements by indicating it on

the following 5-point scale.

My perception of grade level ratings is mostly the same as publishers'.

- 1. Strongly disagree
- 2. Disagree
- 3. Neutral
- 4. Agree
- 5. Strongly Agree

My perception of grade level ratings is mostly different than the publishers'.

- 1. Strongly disagree
- 2. Disagree
- 3. Neutral
- 4. Agree
- 5. Strongly Agree

Based on your experience, select one of the following:

- The publisher rates pieces much harder than band directors' perceptions
- The publisher rates pieces somewhat harder than band directors' perceptions
- No discrepancy
- The publisher rates pieces somewhat easier than band directors' perceptions
- The publisher rates pieces much easier than band directors' perceptions

Upon which criteria do you base your selection of grade-level appropriate literature for your ensemble?

- 1. Not at all important
- 2. Slightly important
- 3. Moderately important
- 4. Very important
- 5. Extremely important

Composition Length

Rhythmic Difficulty/Complexity

Tempo

Key Signatures

Time Signatures/Meter

Wind Instrumentation/Scoring

Percussion Instrumentation

Part Independence

Cross-Cueing Options

Musical density

Composition Length

Rhythmic Difficulty/Complexity

Tempo

Key Signatures

Time Signatures/Meter

Wind Instrumentation/Scoring

Percussion Instrumentation

Part Independence

Cross-Cueing Options

Musical density

Do you consider tessitura (instrument range) as an important criterion when selecting grade-level appropriate repertoire?

- Yes
- No

If you consider tessitura (instrument range) as an important criterion, what instrument ranges do you review? *

- 1. Not at all important
- 2. Slightly important
- 3. Moderately important
- 4. Very important
- 5. Extremely important

Flute

Double Reeds

Clarinet

Saxophone

Trumpet

Horn

Low Brass

Percussion

APPENDIX G

PERCEIVED CONCERT BAND GRADING RECOMMENDATIONS

Survey Questions for Each Composition

What is the perceived grade level of the previous excerpt?

- Grade 1 (Very Easy)
- Grade 2 (Easy)
- Grade 3 (Medium Easy)
- Grade 4 (Medium Difficult)
- Grade 5 (Difficult)
- Grade 6 (Very Difficult)

Open ended question:

• Why did you choose this grade level?

Survey Compositions

















Composition #3





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Composition #9

			Allegro non troppo, c	on brio (. = 72)					5	
Flutes	I II	&+ 1	ff marcato	e ebe ^{be} be		-	P		5 , , s	ķ
Oboes	I II	&+ 1	a2 ff marcato			-		·····	977 5	ž
B♭ Clarinets	п	8# 1 8# 1	ff marcato		,				\$ 7 7 f \$ 7 7	} }
Eb Alto Clarine	t	&##1</td><td>ff marcato</td><td>e. e y b.</td><td></td><td><u>.</u></td><td></td><td></td><td>5 5 7 7 6</td><td>*</td></tr><tr><td>Bb Bass Clarine</td><td>t</td><td>8* 1</td><td>ff marcato</td><td>. be be</td><td>Fp.</td><td></td><td></td><td>J</td><td>)⁷⁷</td><td>\$</td></tr><tr><td>Bassoon</td><td></td><td>(9°6 {</td><td>₿b.</td><td>e be be</td><td>fp</td><td></td><td>.</td><td></td><td>f N7 7</td><td>\$[:]</td></tr><tr><td>E) Alto Saxophones</td><td>I II</td><td>&##1</td><td>ff marcato</td><td>s: s s y b^bs hs</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td><u></u></td><td>5 5 7 7 5</td><td>¥</td></tr><tr><td>B⁵ Tenor Saxophone</td><td></td><td>&* 1</td><td>ff marcato</td><td> y b. be</td><td>P</td><td>· · · ·</td><td>ſ</td><td><u>ل</u></td><td>9 7 7 F</td><td>}:</td></tr><tr><td>E^b Baritone Saxophone</td><td></td><td>6##1</td><td>ff marcato</td><td>J. be 40</td><td>fp</td><td></td><td>.</td><td></td><td>5 5 5</td><td>¥</td></tr><tr><td>F Horns</td><td>I II</td><td>[6 1</td><td>f marcato</td><td>\$: \$ \$ 7 b\$ 58</td><td>g: fp</td><td></td><td>a2</td><td></td><td>377</td><td>\$</td></tr><tr><td>B♭ Trumpets</td><td>I</td><td>6# 1 0#</td><td>Allegro non troppo, c</td><td>on brio $(J = 72)$</td><td>\$ 7 7</td><td>\$</td><td></td><td></td><td>5 f a2</td><td><u></u></td></tr><tr><td></td><td>щ</td><td><u>6</u></td><td>ff marcato</td><td>s: s s ⁷ b^bs 4s</td><td>#s) 7 7</td><td>ţ.</td><td></td><td>•</td><td>ŗ</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Trombones</td><td>п</td><td>9°⊾ { 9°⊾ {</td><td>ff marcato</td><td></td><td>fp 6</td><td></td><td>р. 8:</td><td>ſ </td><td>7 , 5 5 7 7 5</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Baritone</td><td></td><td>9°6 (</td><td>ff marcato ff marcato</td><td>a. be be</td><td>fp fp fp</td><td></td><td>P.</td><td></td><td>ŗ ŗ,</td><td>¥</td></tr><tr><td>Tuba</td><td></td><td>9%</td><td>ff marcato</td><td>e. be be</td><td>fp</td><td>.</td><td>.</td><td>•</td><td>7 7</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Timpani & Crotales</td><td></td><td>9:, {</td><td>₽-G-C</td><td>0. ></td><td><i>.</i></td><td>ş.</td><td></td><td>-</td><td></td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Mallets (Bells, Vibraphone, Xylophone, Temple Blocks)</td><td></td><td>\$. I</td><td>Bells</td><td></td><td>P</td><td>ł</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Cymbals, Guiro)</td><td></td><td>H C. C.</td><td>f marcato</td><td><u>-</u> ۹:-</td><td></td><td>-</td><td></td><td>-</td><td></td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>Percussion II (Castanets, Suspended Cymbal, Tambourine, Triangle, Ratchet)</td><td></td><td>Casta</td><td>ff marcato</td><td>y and y and sus. Cy</td><td>m. # P</td><td></td><td>ø:</td><td>-</td><td>3 7 7</td><td>- }:</td></tr></tbody></table>								





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Composition #10







