

2018

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### Recommended Citation

Lowe, G. M. (2018). Competition Versus Cooperation: Implications for Music Teachers following Students Feedback from Participation in a Large-scale Cooperative Music Festival. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(5). <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n5.6>

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<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol43/iss5/6>

## **Competition versus Cooperation: Implications for Music Teachers following Student Feedback from Participation in a Large-scale Cooperative Music Ensemble Festival**

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*Abstract: Competition is reported in the general education literature as having a largely detrimental impact upon student engagement and long-term motivation, yet competition has long been an accepted part of the music education ensemble landscape. Adjudicated ensemble competitions and competition-festivals are commonplace in most Australian states, as opposed to large-scale cooperative events. Arguments advanced in support of competitive events revolve primarily around perceived extra-musical benefits framed from the director / conductor perspective. The student voice is rarely considered in assessments of the impact of participation. This study presents student feedback following participation in an alternative large-scale cooperative music ensemble festival. Students were surveyed immediately after the event, and key findings revealed enhanced enjoyment and motivation to continue and improve across all year levels and playing groups following the cooperative festival. These findings indicate the need for music educators to rethink the purpose of large-scale music ensemble events, understand the potential of cooperative events in promoting long-term musical engagement, and highlight the importance and value of acknowledging the student voice.*

### **Introduction**

Solo and ensemble competitions are an accepted part of the music landscape, and are a multi-million dollar industry (Eisenberg & Thompson, 2011; Glejser & Heyndels, 2001). Large-scale school ensemble contests are commonplace in the U.S. and while less prevalent in Australia, exist in privately sponsored and state-based events. Arguments for and against these events remain consistent over time (Neil 1944; Burnsed & Sochinski, 1983; Miller, 1994; Payne, 1997; Rohrer, 2002; Lalonde, 2013; Whitener, 2016). Proponents claim they are an indispensable educational tool and advance 'Darwinian' claims that competition is necessary for survival, character building, advancement and preparation for the real world (Neil, 1944; Rogers, 1985; Payne, 1997). Arguments against revolve around pressure on conductors, musical value, educational value, adjudication fairness and student welfare (LaRue, 1986; Miller, 1994; Payne, 1997; Rohrer, 2002; Lalonde, 2013; Whitener, 2016), and framed primarily from the conductor or organiser perspective. Despite the rise of competition-festivals where ensembles are rated but not ranked, there is still little evidence as to their long-term impact on students. Further, the student voice is often not considered in assessments of these events, especially in the Australian context. This article presents student feedback following participation in an alternative large-scale cooperative ensemble festival where the focus was on enjoyment, cooperative and motivational outcomes.

## Background to this Research

Terms such as contest, competition, festival and competition-festival are largely interchangeable within the literature. For this article, the terms ‘competition’ and ‘competition-festival’ have been utilized (Rohrer, 2002). He defined a music competition as an organised event in which groups or individuals are adjudicated and rankings given. Rankings, such as a first, second and third place represent an objective assessment of participant performances relative to each other by one or a panel of adjudicators. A competition-festival, although frequently promoted as a ‘festival’, also involves adjudication and the awarding of performance certificates. More oblique than a competition, competition-festivals rate rather than rank using performance levels such as ‘gold’, ‘silver’ and ‘bronze’, or ‘outstanding’, ‘very good’ and ‘good’. While not awarding outright winners, competition-festivals still emphasise externally graded assessments of performance standards. Klausman (1966) noted the rise of competition-festivals in the U.S. was driven by the need to reduce over-emphasis on winning, and make events less threatening for students. Despite this, Rohrer (2002) noted the absence of a coherent philosophy for music competition-festivals, and the danger that any unit of measure can become a way of evaluating an ensemble; not achieving a ‘gold’ standard can reflect upon the ensemble, and the wider school music program in turn. While a three year study by Guegold (1990) indicated a rating process to be more consistent than ranking, Miller (1994) claimed that standards are frequently undefined and open to interpretation. Further, he noted that limitations on the number of ensembles able to achieve the top standard can result in a tangible ‘pecking order’. For some, not achieving a ‘gold’ standard represents failure.

This current study was undertaken in an Australian state which supports a series of large state-wide school competition-festivals. Ensembles perform publically at a festival venue in ‘divisions’ according to their playing standard, play three pieces (selected from ‘set festival’ repertoire) and are on stage for an average of 15 – 20 minutes (including warming up and tuning). With the exception of novice ensembles, each ensemble is rated by a panel of experts. The 2016 festival program states:

*“Ensembles which, in the opinion of the adjudicators, perform at their optimum will have their certificate inscribed with a grading of Merit, Excellent or Outstanding” (p. 8).*

Results, previously publically announced at the conclusion of the festivals, are published on the festival website. Promoted as festivals, these events are in reality competition-festivals as ensembles are adjudicated, rated and results made public.

Following growing concern over the educational and motivational benefits of participation in these events, music staff at two secondary schools with large ensemble programs opted to create an alternative cooperative festival. Linked to both schools general aims of making students ‘future ready’ by developing skills for use beyond school, the specific aims were: 1) to provide all students with a peak music performance, 2) provide students with an extended performance in a context which is meaningful and purely artistic, 3) provide students at both schools with the opportunity to perform repertoire not possible wholly within either school’s program, 4) provide the motivational impetus of co-operative music making as a replacement for competitive goal structures, 5) give students the opportunity to perform in a quality venue and 6) motivate students in junior ensembles by giving them an opportunity to hear senior groups within their own school (Coy, 2016). Two secondary aims were: 1) to seek students’ responses to participation in the festival as an alternative event, and 2) promote longitudinal cooperation of students beyond their schooling (Coy, 2016).

The resulting Combined Schools' Music Festival (CSMF) took place over three days in June 2016. It culminated in a performances in the state's main concert venue and involved over 800 students from both schools. As a CSMF aim was to allow students meaningful stage time (up to 30 minutes per ensemble), the final performance was split into an afternoon band concert and an evening orchestral concert, with students seated in the upper gallery of the concert venue to allow them the opportunity to hear other ensembles. To contextualise student feedback on the CSMF, a literature review was undertaken into large-scale school music competitions.

## Literature Review

In general terms, Lalonde defined contemporary applications of competition in education as an 'act of rivalry' (2013, p. 20), while Woodford (2010) described it as a political statement whereby competitive structures align with neoliberal notions of discipline and efficiency. Moss pointed out that competition, explicit or not, is endemic in schools from the school curriculum that streams students into ability levels, to the status of certain subjects creating a hegemony which can subordinate certain activities to a lesser place in the school social hierarchy (Moss, in Churchill et al, 2016). By contrast, Lalonde drew upon the Aristotelian definition as meaning "to come together, to be qualified", or "to strive alongside another for the attainment of something" (2013, p. 20), implying something quite different. The neoliberal definition emphasises the need to defeat other 'competitors' while the Aristotelian emphasises internal challenge, more conducive to teamwork. Accordingly, education theorists are unsure whether competition should be encouraged or constrained, which Verhoeff (1997) claimed can confuse students.

## Arguments in Support of School Music Ensemble Competitions

In summarising why directors enter competitions, Payne (1997) cited 1) expectation from the school, 2) personal enjoyment derived from competing, and 3) perceived educational or program benefits. Both Rogers (1985), and Burnsed and Sochinski (1983) reported the highest values cited by headmasters and conductors to be improving public relations and personal benefits to students (discipline, responsibility, pride). No empirical evidence is presented to support these benefit claims, but they present as a recurring theme, and include motivation and group spirit (DeuPree, 1968; LaRue, 1986), pursuit of excellence (Shields & Bredemeier, 2010), discipline (Neil, 1944; Rogers, 1985), sense of accomplishment (Hurst, 1994), and incentive for hard work (Neil, 1944). Musical justifications include the maintenance of performance goals (Hurst, 1994) and improved performance standards (DeuPree, 1968; LaRue, 1986). However, support is not unequivocal. Reporting on a survey of Alabama ensemble directors, LaRue (1986) noted that only three items scored above 60% on an assessment of contest value, namely 1) high ratings makes the band feel good, 2) contests raise the spirit of the band, and 3) contests raise standards of performance. Both DeuPree (1968) and Rogers (1985) reported the widespread claim that extra-musical benefits outweigh musical disadvantages. Further, Miller (1994) cited fear expressed by some conductors that lack of competition may reduce standards and motivation; Rohrer (2002) reported a claim made by a leading state music supervisor in the U.S. that non-rated festivals result in better feelings but lower standards. Paradoxically, Miller (1994) reported that musical excellence can diminish as competitive situations increase. Supporting arguments also cite evaluation. Caimi (1981) reported that many conductors describe

adjudication to be a useful evaluation tool while Payne (1997) reported the belief that competitions offer an easy and objective measure of aesthetic development. Rohrer (2002) cited the long cited belief that the adjudicator’s function is to help conductors do a better job.

**Arguments against School Music Ensemble Competitions**

Supporters of competitions often draw parallels with sport where competition is a driver. By contrast, Coleman (1976) argued that musicians find their endeavours inherently more cooperative than athletes:

*“the competitive situation is one in which reinforcement is prescribed on the basis of a subject’s behaviour relative to that of other individuals; while the cooperative or less-competitive situation involves working in harmony to achieve a mutually agreeable end...” (p. 4)*

Rohrer (2002) described the problem of winning becoming the primary driver over improvement or learning. McCormick (2009) cautioned that winning can create the myth of the hero rather than the performance act of interpreting musical meaning and conveying it to the audience. Drawing upon multiple studies, Payne (1997) synthesized 13 reasons why many directors do not compete (Table 1).

<b>Reasons for conductor non-involvement</b>	
<b>1</b>	Inexperienced conductors have not yet developed a philosophy to make competing a positive educative experience
<b>2</b>	Competition is not the role of education. Its emphasizes winning, not learning
<b>3</b>	Competition causes students to overlearn a few things at the expense of general learning
<b>4</b>	Competition takes too much time
<b>5</b>	Adjudication is inconsistent and adjudicators not always qualified
<b>6</b>	Some directors only go to contests to prove their program is better than someone else’s
<b>7</b>	Competition encourages questionable teaching practices
<b>8</b>	Low ratings can destroy esprit de corps
<b>9</b>	Competition performance conditions are not always adequate. Feedback is often directed at error diagnosis only
<b>10</b>	Students do not always get to hear other groups
<b>11</b>	Competing every year causes stress for conductors trying to maintain high ratings
<b>12</b>	Competition becomes a source of prestige among conductors
<b>13</b>	Competitions may cause administrators to view music ensembles with athletic teams

**Table 1. Reasons given for conductors’ non-involvement in competitive musical events**

Reasons cited in Table 1 fall into the interrelated categories of conductor, musical and adjudication concerns. Payne claimed competitions are meant to motivate and evaluate student achievement, but are in reality more of an evaluation of the conductor. Burnsed and Sochinski (1983) reported that the musical value of contesting received the lowest ratings from conductors. Teachout (2007), LaRue (1986) and Neil (1944) warned that conductors can neglect musical skills development ultimately impacting student motivation to participate in community music post-graduation by overemphasising the competitive aspect, spending too much time on festival pieces and de-emphasising other quality ensembles. Rohrer (2002) further warned that competition between ensembles can translate to competition within ensembles, unless carefully managed, while Miller (1994) claimed competitions can pit conductors against each other, potentially jeopardizing relationships with colleagues.

In musical terms, Schmidt (2011) and Miller (1994) argued that competition generates conformity through set repertoire, class categories and regulations; creativity and originality is killed in lieu of standardized interpretations. While Eisenberg and Thompson (2011) agreed, they also claimed that competing can improve ensemble technique. However, Miller

(1994) argued that 15 / 20 minutes of stage time does not allow for a competent assessment of musical calibre. Musical quality tends to be judged by scores received, and younger ensembles are often judged against standards for which they are not ready. Thus, the aesthetic rating of students across divisions is not equal.

Criticism is particularly directed at the evaluation process. Payne (1997) noted that the reliability of measurements of achievement depend upon 1) the criteria used, 2) the environment in which the event takes place, and 3) the number and qualifications of the adjudicator. Assessment criteria draw heavy criticism. In an attempt to appear objective, adjudication often relies on detailed assessment criteria. Resulting problems are dissected thoroughly by Stanley, Brooker and Gilbert (2002) who maintained that assessment criteria create an illusion of objectivity, since they are ultimately dependent on subjective adjudicator judgements. Regelski (1966) cited flaws in validity as no definitive or uniform criteria exist for rating determinations, while Asmus and Radocy stated that accuracy may not be possible because:

*“Reliability in its pure sense is the stability of the measure across time, which may be ascertained by determining the agreement between two different administrations of the same test at some time interval” (1992, p. 144).*

Highlighting evaluation inconsistencies, Caimi (1979) reported correlations between festival ratings and ensemble size with a bias towards bigger ensembles, while Burdett (1985) described grade inflation with adjudicators overly favouring upper ratings and Payne (1997) citing adjudicator fatigue making success dependent on performance order. In analysing rankings of a major international competition over a 40 year period, Glejser and Heyndels (2001) reported performers who perform later in the week or given day obtain a better classification. Finally Tsay reported the potential issue of non-conscious dependence on visual cues:

*“The dominance of visual information emerges to the degree that is overweighed relative to auditory information, even when sound is consciously valued as the core domain content” (2013, p.14580)*

Student welfare has long been discussed. As long ago as 1950, Ames argued that tension, pressure and rivalry could be eliminated for smaller schools through a cooperative festival format. Miller (1994) cited stress as a particular problem as adolescents undergo massive physical and emotional change. Lalonde (2013) noted that success is dependent upon the failure of the majority; Ormrod (2012), Robinson (2008) and Austin (1988a) argued competition to be damaging to the self-esteem of students who do not receive top ratings, while Kohut (1985) expressed concern for students unprepared for the consequences of losing. Maxwell (1971) cited a correlation between higher contest ratings and authoritarian discipline techniques. Tellingly, both Hewitt and Allen (2012) and Rohrer (2002) highlighted the short-term value of competition; after the contest, interest is dead.

### **The Student Perspective**

Largely absent from the literature is the student perspective, in terms of empirical student-impact studies, or direct evidence from the students themselves. What does exist is often ambiguous. Whitener (2016) reported competition negatively affects retention. However, Head (1983) reported no significant differences in attitudes among high school students whose conductors emphasize competitions while Burnsed and Sochinski (1983) reported slightly more positive attitudes towards competitions among older students than younger ones. Robinson (2008) speculated whether this is because younger students who have suffered negative experiences have dropped out. Burnsed and Sochinski (1983) report

generally low motivational ratings for competitions, with students citing long practices, biased judging and losing as the most negative aspects. However, marginally more positive attitudes were reported from students in larger bands. Conversely, Burnsed, Sochinski and Hinkle (1983) reported attitudes towards competitions to be less positive among college-aged students, and Arnwine (1996) noted that more college music majors come from non-competitive schools. Finally, in terms of achievement, Rohrer (2002) reported on a study in which students from non-competitive bands scored significantly higher on the Colwell Music Aptitude Test than students from competitive bands.

### **Educational Outcomes and Motivation**

Payne (1997) noted that while competitions are frequently cited as motivators, their true impact is unknown. Overall, there appears to have been few efforts to correlate ensemble competitions with educational outcomes and motivation, despite this being a popular topic in the general literature. Student learning orientations are a robust predictor of student achievement (Goss & Sonnemann, 2017), potentially providing a lens into the impact of music competitions on student learning outcomes and motivation.

Researchers have described two multifaceted learning orientations: learning/task/intrinsic, and performance/ego/extrinsic (Nicholls, 1984; Dweck 1986; Deci & Ryan, 1985). These different but complementary perspectives were synthesized by Marsh et al (2003) into the 'big-two-factor theory', which they labelled as learning and performance orientations. Mastery, cooperation and intrinsic motivation load with a learning orientation, while ego, competition, praise and failure avoidance load with performance. The learning orientation emphasises the quality of involvement to the individual whereas the performance orientation revolves around social comparisons. While Marsh et al (2003) stated that students can be directed towards either orientation by situational cues and classroom climates, they maintained that cooperative learning environments lead to greater expectations of success, commitment to learning, incentive for achievement and intrinsic motivation. Examining the learning orientation of 300 band students in the U.S. towards learning a musical instrument, Schmidt (2005) stated that student assessments of success were best defined by mastery and cooperation orientations, and less by competitive and ego orientations. Students said they did their best when working with other students. He stated

*"The results suggest that students may respond best to the intrinsic or cooperative aspects of instrumental music, rather than extrinsic or competitive aspects" (2005, p. 144).*

Further, Schmidt (2005) reported that commitment to band correlated with intrinsic, cooperative and mastery orientations, while competition promoted ego orientations. Competition stimulated motivation, but not commitment to band, mastery or cooperation. Similarly, both Whitener (2016) and Diaz (2009) reported intrinsic and cooperative orientations to be powerful factors in long-term musical engagement and motivation, with extrinsic motivators detrimental to retention. Related research by Droe (2012) suggested that the nature of feedback in competition-festivals played a role in promoting learning orientations and achievement, with praise directed towards ability giving students a short burst of pride followed by negative consequences, as opposed to praise of effort. He also reported that praise directed towards performance and ego goals increased failure avoidance and competitiveness as students became more concerned about the scores of others than in improving their own performance.

Findings on learning orientations are not necessarily dichotomous; Marsh et al (2003) and Diaz (2009) reported that competitive ego orientations can sometimes relate to desirable

outcomes when carefully managed. In explaining these seemingly ambiguous findings, Lalonde (2013) believed it is a question of differentiation between ‘true competition’ (striving for excellence within) versus ‘decomposition’ (striving against others); when success is attributed to the product (performance) not the process (mastery), motivation becomes extrinsic and eclipses the intrinsic value of participation. In conclusion, while learning orientations offer insights into the potential effects of music competitions on student motivation, the authors are unaware of any specific studies at this stage utilizing this framework.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedures**

A stated CSMF aim was to seek student responses to participation. The authors concurred with Fielding (2004) in speaking *with* students rather than *for* students, and were in the unique position of having access to a number of students from one school who had participated in both the CSMF as well as the state-based competition-festival in previous years. Given the numbers of students involved, the researchers chose to administer an anonymous survey. The survey instrument asked students for responses to a series of questions, with room to write additional comments relating to each question if they wished. Thus the instrument was deemed valuable in gaining quantitative breadth with additional comments potentially providing a degree of qualitative depth.

Full ethical clearances were sought in advance of the project, and the survey was distributed in the participating school’s rehearsals two weeks after the event (the other school declined to participate); this was considered enough time for the experience to have settled in students’ minds yet still remain fresh for informed feedback. Participation was voluntary, and surveys were completed by 345 students from years 7 – 12, representing a response rate of 88%, providing a large enough reliable sample (Bell, 2005). Survey items returned a Cronbach reliability rating of .89.

### **Survey Instrument**

The instrument comprised 21 researcher-generated items. Of these, 13 were generic items for all students, two items specifically for students not in senior ensembles, two items related to conductors, and four items directed at students who had previously performed in the state-based competition-festivals. In addition, demographic items, including school, year group and ensemble were also obtained. Students were asked to rate items based upon a five-point Likert scale. For the purpose of this article, 11 items are reported on comprising 1) perceptions of enjoyment (1 item), 2) student co-operation across schools (two items), 3) motivation to continue music studies (2 items), 4) motivation of younger students as a result of hearing the senior ensembles (2 items) and 5) comparisons with the state-based competition-festival (4 items).

In addition, 293 participant comments were reviewed. These were coded via a three stage process. Stage one involved correlating comments with survey items while stage two involved delineation into the demographic categories of year group and ensemble. The final process involved separating comments into positive and negative foci. For the purpose of this article, only comments which correlate to the relevant items have been included, and students are identified by year level.



**Data**

**Enjoyment**

Item 1 asked students to rate their levels of enjoyment from participating in the CSMF. Findings are presented as percentages of frequency in Table 2.

N = 545

Very unpleasant	Quite unpleasant	Didn't care	Quite enjoyable	Highly enjoyable
1	2	4	54	39

**Table 2. Percentages of frequency for global ratings of enjoyment**

Encouragingly, over 90% of students returned positive ratings, while only 3% returned negative ratings. Ratings of enjoyment were then broken down by year group. These are presented as percentages of frequency in Table 3.

N = 545

	Very unpleasant	Quite unpleasant	Didn't care	Quite enjoyable	Highly enjoyable
Year 7	1	2	5	52	40
Year 8	2	2	6	63	27
Year 9	0	0	1	52	47
Year 10	1	4	4	54	36
Year 11	0	0	1	53	46
Year 12	0	0	0	51	49

**Table 3. Percentages of frequency for enjoyment by year group**

Enjoyment ratings were consistent across year groups (90% and above), with year 11 and 12 students returning the highest ratings (99 and 100% respectively). High ratings from these year groups were not unexpected as these students had elected to continue post-compulsory music in some form. However, the 99% positive response rate from year 9 students was unexpected as this year group is identified within the motivational literature as exhibiting a sharp decline in interest and enjoyment in music at school (Lowe, 2008).

In total, 198 positive student comments relating to enjoyment were coded, with 20 negative comments. A selection of representative comments is presented below. Many were generic:

*“I thought the CSMF was a very good idea. We should maybe do it with some other schools next time” (year 7).*

*“it was very enjoyable” (year 7).*

Some comments were highly effusive:

*“CSMF is the best day of my life so far” (year 9).*

*“IT WAS INCREDIBLE! The weekend was so amazingly happy and I had the time of my life! 100/10. I don't have enough words to explain how freaking awesome it was” (year 12).*

Another student commented on the large ensemble, as well as the performance venue:

*“I really enjoyed being able to meet with other students and make a massive and great orchestra. I loved watching the symphony orchestra play. Going to [venue] was a great experience, and playing with over 100 people was even better. The sound and the quality of it was unbelievable. I would highly recommend doing this for many years. It was an incredible experience” (year 7).*

Importantly, in relation to past experiences, one student stated:

*“I enjoyed that it was more about enjoyment and less competitive” (year 12).*

Most negative comments related to organisation and fatigue:

*“I really enjoyed performing but the concert went too long and the rehearsals were boring. I would like to do it again if it were not so long and the concert started earlier...I was so tired at school on Monday” (year 7).*

On balance, the weight of positive ratings and comments indicated that students overwhelmingly enjoyed the CSMF, citing the large ensembles, choice of concert venue and de-emphasis on competition as their primary reasons.

### Cooperation

Item 2 asked about the levels of enjoyment obtained from working with students from the opposite school, while item 3 asked for perceptions of cooperation versus competitiveness between students from each school. Global cooperative enjoyment is presented as percentages of frequency in Table 4 while global ratings of the perceived level of cooperation is presented as percentages of frequency in Table 5.

N = 545				
Unpleasant	Awkward	Didn't care	Enjoyable	Highly enjoyable
1	5	19	46	29

**Table 4. Percentages of frequency for cooperative enjoyment**

Table 4 revealed that three-quarters of students enjoyed working cooperatively with each other, while very few did not.

N = 545				
Highly competitive	Slightly competitive	Didn't interact	Slightly cooperative	Highly cooperative
1	5	11	48	35

**Table 5. Percentages of frequency for perceived levels of cooperation**

Table 5 revealed a slightly higher percentage of cooperation than Table 4, suggesting that a majority of students did perceive the CSMF to generate a cooperative environment, although they may not have enjoyed it quite so much.

Seventy-seven positive student comments were coded against nine negative. They offered insights to the students' experiences of cooperating with others. Some students described a natural wariness at first:

*“...there was a bit of distance between the schools – sometimes when we bunch up we sort of separate into our own little group. In breaks the whole orchestra divided up into \* and \*, then the smaller year groups. So in summary, we are all friendly but kept to our own.” (year 10).*

Others were more positive:

*“it was very nice meeting new people and interacting with them. I would like to do it again next year” (year 7).*

Cooperation translated into an understanding of teamwork:

*“I really liked having the CSMF because \* students were so nice to us and they sound so good with us and I think that we make a really good team together. I hope we have another one next year so we can all see our \* friends again and perform with them. It was such an amazing experience...” (year 8).*

Older students, in particular, wrote of lasting friendships formed:

*“CSMF has made many others and I new friends and the bond of \* and \* has gotten stronger. After CSMF some \* and \* are still keeping in touch with each other and the fun is still there” (year 10).*

On balance, the CSMF did appear to achieve its aim of generating a cooperative environment, despite lack of student familiarity with working in this manner potentially impacting perceptions of cooperative enjoyment for some.

### Motivation to Continue and Improve

Item 4 asked students to rate their motivation to continue their music studies, while item 5 asked students to rate their motivation to improve on their instrument. Both motivation items are presented as percentages of frequency in Table 6.

N = 542					
	Not at all	A little	Normal rate	Quite strongly	Very strongly
4. Motivation to continue	8	16	31	31	15
5. Motivation to improve	8	15	32	29	16

**Table 6. Percentages of frequency of motivation to continue, and motivation to improve**

Table 6 responses were not as equivocal as for items 1 – 3, and both questions generated very similar ratings. However, the responses still indicated that around 45% of students rated strong motivation to continue music studies and an equally strong desire to improve as a direct result of CSMF participation.

Eighty-eight positive student comments were coded against one negative comment. They offered some insights into the general motivational effects of the CSMF. Some students were motivated purely by involvement:

*“Although the festival was very tiring, it was extremely fun and enjoyable, and motivated me to do better and practice more in music...” (year 9).*

Others were motivated by hearing the standard of the ensembles:

*“It was well enjoyed in many aspects and it has strongly motivated me to become better at music through seeing higher level of bands” (year 9).*

*“The rehearsal was fun but really tiring. I LOVED listening to the higher wind orchestras!!! (Amazing!!) I hope we do another next year...” (year 9).*

Overall, the CSMF did appear to positively impact student motivation to continue and improve, but the slightly more muted response may relate to the limited timeframe of the event.

### Motivation of Younger Students

Item 6 asked younger students to rate their motivation to continue their music studies, while item 7 asked students to rate their motivation to improve on their instrument as a result of hearing senior ensembles. Both items are presented as percentages of frequency in Table 7.

N = 383					
	Not at all	A little	Normal rate	Quite strongly	Very strongly
6. Motivation to continue	4	14	20	33	29
7. Motivation to improve	7	14	26	29	24

**Table 7. Percentages of frequency of motivation to continue and improve of younger students**

Motivational responses from younger students were generally higher than for the overall cohort. Over 60% of younger students indicated positive ratings for continuing music studies, with more than 50% indicating positive ratings to improve on their instruments. Ratings suggest the high motivational impact of the CSMF on younger students who are associated

traditionally with high drop-out rates from school instrumental music programs (Lowe, 2012).

A stated CSMF aim was to have younger students see the senior ensembles in action. Fifty-one positive student comments were coded, against no negatives. Comments largely related to the performance standard of senior ensembles:

*“I think it was really fun and now I am really motivated to play in symphony because they were so good” (year 7).*

One student was motivated by the cooperative nature of the event:

*“I felt really inspired by Wind Orchestra 1....there should be more performances with \* to get to know each other and get rid of the competitiveness. It was nice to meet new people...” (year 7).*

Another described the CSMF as a positive music learning experience:

*“Was very fun and enjoyable. Taught a lot more about music because of listening to the other bands” (year 9).*

Most telling however, was a comment relating to the lack of adjudication:

*“I really enjoyed listening to the other ensembles from the upper gallery. I liked how it felt more like a performance than an assessment” (year 8).*

Responses from younger students indicated a higher motivational impact, with most describing the positive effects of hearing senior ensembles, thus providing stimulation and long-term motivational goals for many of them.

#### Comparison with State-based Competition-Festival

Items 8 - 10 asked students in years 8 – 12 to rate their CSMF experiences against the state-based festival in terms of enjoyment, educational value and motivational value, while item 11 asked for student feelings about not participating in the state-based festival. Year 7 students were not able to comment on these items because they had not yet participated in the state-based festival. All four items are presented as percentages of frequency in Table 8.

	Very low	Moderately low	Neutral	Moderately high	Very high
<b>8. Enjoyment (N = 343)</b>	0	5	14	33	48
<b>9. Educative (N = 345)</b>	0	1	21	43	35
<b>10. Motivational (N = 346)</b>	0	2	24	40	34
<b>11. Participation in state-based festival (N = 378)</b>	5	21	53	12	9

**Table 8. Comparison with state-based competition-festival**

Responses varied between the items, with item 8 (enjoyment) returning over 80% positive ratings, in line with positive ratings for item 1. Students also overwhelmingly rated the CSMF as more educative and motivating, and the high neutral and above result for item 11 (74%) suggested students had no strong feelings about non-participation in the state-based competition-festival, possibly indicating the low perceived importance of this event to them. This was also reflected in the relatively few comments received. In coding student comments, 11 indicated a preference for the CSMF against four preferencing the state-based event. One student spoke of the motivational value of the CSMF:

*“Definitely a memorable experience, much more motivating than the [state-based] festival...” (year 10).*

Another spoke in terms of enjoyment:

*“I really enjoyed listening to the other ensembles from the upper gallery. I liked how it felt more like a performance than an assessment” (year 8).*

*“Honestly, I enjoyed the CSMF more than [the state-based festival]. It was a great experience playing with different people and different conductors. I also enjoyed playing in [venue]” (year 11).*

One student echoed the a common criticism of the state-based competition-festival “[The state-based festival] is a waste of time and money. Has no satisfaction ‘cause almost no-one gets to listen, but the CSMF has that satisfaction value, in a proper stage with a proper audience” (year 11).

One student reiterated the extra-musical arguments in favour of the state-based festival: *“While I believe the CSMF was highly enjoyable compared to [the state-based] festival, my main concern lies with the fact that there is no longer a ranking in each division. This ranking helped motivate students and played a part in publicising the \* music program....” (year 12).*

The last word went to one student who described the CSMF in student welfare terms: *“Much more fun than [state-based] festival – less stressful” (year 12).*

## Discussion

In creating the CSMF, the teachers at the two schools desired an event that promoted musical excellence, was cooperative rather than competitive, and was motivational, especially for younger students. Student perceptions of musical excellence, although implied, were not directly assessed in this study which was more concerned with enjoyment and motivational outcomes. Based upon survey responses and comments, it would appear that the CSMF largely achieved its engagement and motivational goals. Of importance were the high student ratings for enjoyment across all year groups and high ratings for cooperation, despite this being an unfamiliar large-scale event framework. Hewitt and Allen (2012) reported enjoyment to be a precursor for engagement. Further, despite limitations in terms of the length of the festival and the nature of the research methodology in assessing long-term motivational impact, there appears to be enough in the student feedback to indicate that the CSMF largely fulfilled its aim of stimulating long-term motivation and engagement. The much higher ratings for enjoyment, educative value and motivation lend general support for cooperative events such as the CSMF as educational and motivational tools from the student perspective over more traditional competitions and competition-festivals. In this, it can be argued that the CSMF aligned with the call from Miller (1994) for emphasis to be on the quality of the student learning experience and not solely on the outcome.

CSMF student feedback largely supported many of the arguments against competitions voiced in the literature, namely issues relating to student welfare and the danger of winning and losing described by Ames as far back as 1950. Feedback supported claims by Robinson (2008) and Miller (1994) relating to student stress, and the maintenance of self-esteem (Austin, 1988a; Ormrod, 2012; Lalonde, 2013), and offers support to claims that events such as this may enhance long-term motivation (Rohrer, 2002; Hewitt & Allen, 2012; Whitener, 2016). Further, feedback may support the claim by Kohn (1986) that competition is not a natural behaviour because it focuses attention and energy on an external force – the fellow competitor rather than the performance at hand – not in evidence in this study where students worked collaboratively across schools towards a mutual goal. However, the researchers note that much of the reviewed literature derives from the U.S., where competitive events are more entrenched.

The study suggests the value of the CSMF in terms of learning orientation stimulation, although learning orientation was not formally part of the research framework. The majority of student spoke of enjoyment, achievement and long-term motivation, all

characteristics associated with mastery and intrinsic orientations. These have been demonstrated in related research to be powerful predictors of retention, long-term musical engagement and commitment to learning, and offer a potentially worthy framework for future studies (Schmidt, 2005; Diaz, 2009; Whitener, 2016). Further, Hewitt and Allen (2012) assert that musical satisfaction is the most important outcome for continuing participation beyond school, along with shared social experience of participation, with feedback from others rating lowest. They restate that competitions stimulate immediate reward but do not sustain long-term engagement, and note positive associations between extracurricular musical activities and improved academic achievement, positive attitudes to school, improved self-esteem and self-concept, improved social networks and social skills, confidence and identity.

### **Implications for Music Educators**

Given positive student feedback, both schools have committed to continuing the CSMF as an annual event. In immediate terms, staff at the participating research school report considerably stronger forward retention of students in their ensemble program over previous years. This may be an indication that a CSMF format is better placed to achieve the aim of making students 'future ready' by improving their educational experience, thus impacting motivation and retention as a precursor to musical engagement beyond school. In this, the CSMF supports the assertion in the literature that competitions and competition-festivals achieve primarily short-term goals. The implications for music educators are clear: 1) competition in music education may actually hinder long term student engagement and motivation, 2) competition is not necessarily desired by students, and 3) there is value in listening to and acknowledging the student voice. Accordingly, music educators may wish to reassess the educational and motivational value to their students of participating in competitive events, and investigate the potential of creating their own combined, cooperative festivals.

This study also implies that it is time for state-based festival organisers to collectively review the purpose of ensemble competitions, and embrace the Aristotelian concept of mutual striving rather than striving against others. Lalonde (2013) forcefully advocated the need for alternative festival models which promote cooperation by uniting and sharing collective ideas, abilities and skills, along with a need to constantly re-evaluate the function and message of competitive structures through reflective and critical thought. She questioned whether values associated with winning and adjudication cultivate growth, or whether they exist only for the sake of competing. Further, Schmidt queried whether competitions involving rankings and ratings simply reflect a neoliberal obsession within modern society:

*"...related research by others suggest that an explicit contradiction exists between society's views of competition and the empirical picture that has emerged. Society values competition as a vestige from our past – a 'true' measure of the value or worth. Yet modern research points to the havoc that competition can create in the educational or developmental processes. While often defended on the basis of its ability to elicit virtuous effort, competition appears to be equally capable of generating a negative type of interaction among students that, especially for those experiencing repeated failure, may lead to diminished performance, anxiety, avoidance behaviour, loss of self-esteem, decreased interest, or discontinued involvement in some task or activity"*  
(2011, p. 8)

The student CSMF experience would appear to counter the negatives described by Schmidt (2011). While Marsh et al (2003) note that learning and performance outcomes may not be as diametrically opposed as originally thought, of great important in the context of this

study is the statement by Eisenberg and Thompson (2011) that competition has a more detrimental impact on younger performers.

In summary, Kohn (1986) described competition as a learned behaviour which damages rather than builds character by corrupting relationships, while Woodford (2010) claimed a degree of indoctrination in the assumption that music ensemble programs cannot exist without them. Finally, Lalonde (2013) ascribed the danger of defining music education through competitions whereby its worth lies not in a curriculum for knowledge but within an activity in which winning is the primary goal:

*“ it is perhaps no longer our task to identify the pros and cons of competitions, but more so to determine whether or not the current functioning of competitive structures in music education accurately reflect the true potential of our field”*  
(2013, p. 22).

Certainly, student feedback from the CSMF has added weight to Lalonde’s call. The evidence is in; the students have spoken.

## Coda

Following growing concern expressed over its educational and motivational value, the state-based festival moved in 2017 to no longer publish ensemble ratings, and offer workshop time on stage with festival adjudicators. Initial feedback from conductors, students and parents to these initiatives has been overwhelmingly positive.

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