

Comentoring in a University Jazz Ensemble

By

Andrew Goodrich
Boston University

Jon Kracht
Independent Scholar

Josh McDonald
Boston University

Colin Sapp
Berklee College of Music

Abstract

This study explored comentoring in a university jazz ensemble located in a metropolitan area in the Northeast United States. Participants included undergraduate members of the ensemble. The following questions guided this study: (1) How did the participants participate in the comentoring process? (2) What benefits did the participants report as a result of comentoring? Interviews of the participants comprised the data. Coding revealed themes of mentoring each other, having a “Voice” in the ensemble, and camaraderie with comentoring. As a result, the researchers concluded that teachers might implement comentoring in a music ensemble in order to establish stronger social connections, which in turn would elevate the performance level of the students.

Keywords: Comentoring, peer mentoring, jazz, social connections

Today, young musicians typically learn how to play jazz music in a school jazz ensemble, with the teacher often serving as the sole deliverer of information such as playing correct notes, style, and articulations. This one-way exchange of information from teacher-to-student can create an environment that is not conducive for students to teach or learn from each other. In the early days of jazz, however, musicians often learned from mentoring each other in non-academic settings (Goodrich, 2008). These mentoring relationships—typically patriarchal and considered “peer mentoring”—entailed an older, more experienced player providing guidance to a younger player (Goodrich, 2007). Yet, when students mentor each other, research indicates that students have a greater influence upon their peer’s learning process than their teacher (Goodlad, 2013). Providing opportunities for students to mentor each other in a jazz ensemble allows them to make deeper social connections amongst themselves while teaching and learning to perform jazz music. Furthermore, such connections elevate the performance level of the jazz ensemble.

Training Mentors

Hierarchical relationships exist in traditional mentoring approaches in which the mentor delivers information to the mentee (e.g., Darwin, 2000; Driscoll, Parkes, Tilley-Lubbs, Brill, & Pitts Bannister, 2009; Hansman, 2003; McCormack & West, 2006). With regard to establishing a mentoring process free of hierarchical bias, Stader (2001) recommended that instructors include as many students as possible in the peer mentoring process. McCormack and West (2006) provided a similar recommendation, and added that several faculty members, instead of one, should be involved with guiding mentees to avoid hierarchical power relationships in peer mentoring. Within mentoring relationships, though, students are not always aware of their roles, boundaries, and expectations (Colvin, 2007). For example, Colvin and Ashman (2010) explored the perspectives of students, instructors, and mentors involved in a university mentor program.

They found that experience and gender impact how people deal with relationships and benefits within peer mentoring. Further, participants were not always aware of their role in the mentoring process. Time spent in the mentoring program and gender contributed to how participants defined their roles, expectations, and training in a mentoring program. Active planning and involvement from instructors contributes to establishing a successful peer mentoring program (e.g., Smith, 2008).

Academic Success With Mentoring

Colvin (2007) discovered that clarification of roles in addition to training was essential with regard to socialization of faculty, and student mentors and mentees. Previous research has examined older university-level students mentoring first-year students. For example, Leidenfrost, Strassnig, Schabmann, Spiel, and Carbon (2011) examined mentoring styles in relation to traditional methods and academic success among first-year student mentees in a university-level peer mentoring program. They found that the mentoring style—motivating master mentoring—had a positive effect on participation success with mentees. In one instance, Fox, Stevenson, Connelly, Duff, and Dunlop (2010) investigated the impact of third-year students, who mentored first-year students in the Mentor Accountant Project (MAP), in two universities in Scotland. Using students in the MAP and students who did not participate in the MAP, the researchers found that first-year students who participated in the MAP demonstrated stronger academic performance than those who did not participate. Results for third-year mentors indicated that those who participated in the MAP did not show any significant improvement with their own academic performance over those who did not participate in the MAP.

Peer Mentoring in Music

Previous studies examined the development of personal interactions through the mentoring process. For example, Madsen (2011) studied an after-school cross-age reading program for fourth and fifth grade students in which music teacher education students served as the tutors. Madsen discovered that both the university and elementary students found the personal connections developed during the mentoring process meaningful. Foster (2013) explored reciprocal peer mentoring in a secondary piano lab in which the instructor did not serve as the sole deliverer of course content to the students. During the peer mentoring process, participants experienced a high level of comfort via social interaction with each other and valued the variety of perspectives that each had to offer during the learning process. Goodrich (2007), whose study was particularly relevant to our study, investigated peer mentoring in a high school jazz ensemble. In that study, the researcher explored an established peer mentoring system implemented by the director of a high school jazz ensemble to elevate the performance level of the ensembles. Peer mentoring in this study occurred for musical and social reasons, and involved the development of verbal leadership skills among the students.

Definition of Co Mentoring

For the purpose of this study, in which we examined mentoring among undergraduate students in a university level jazz ensemble, we use the term “co mentoring.” In the past, studies examined alternative mentoring approaches with peer mentoring. Within the framework of alternative mentoring, Mullen (2005) discussed co mentoring, in which participants in the mentoring process maintain both teaching and learning roles. Co mentoring is more aligned with a matriarchal approach than the paternalistic approach, based in a Feminist perspective, and is more commonly found in traditional mentoring structures. Co mentoring is often used with

minorities, women, and other disadvantaged groups (Mullen, 2005). We frame our definition of comentoring within two parameters: any student-to-student teaching (referred to as peer coaching and can include modeling, verbal coaching, and feedback); and student-to-student learning. While we consider peer mentoring an established instructional practice in many jazz ensembles (e.g., section leaders running sectionals), we did not identify any studies that specifically investigated comentoring in a university-level ensemble, nor did we find any studies that evaluated student reflection on their own teaching and learning processes in a university-level jazz ensemble. The purpose of this study was to investigate how the students in this collegiate jazz ensemble engaged in the comentoring process. The following questions guided our study:

1. How did the students participate in the comentoring process?
2. What benefits did the participants report as a result of comentoring?

Mentoring Context

A private university in the Northeast United States served as the site for this study. The music program at this university did not offer a jazz degree, but did offer jazz courses. These included the Big Band, two jazz combos, a jazz workshop class designed for beginning jazz students, and a jazz history course. Students also had the opportunity to participate in monthly jam sessions held on campus.

The study examined comentoring in a Big Band jazz ensemble that was comprised of twenty-two student members. Three were graduate students, and the nineteen undergraduate students included one music education major, three music performance majors, and fifteen who pursued non-music degrees. Because the focus of this study was on comentoring among undergraduates with no prior teaching experience, the graduate students were not included in this

study, as they had prior teaching experience and taught the ensemble along with the instructor during the course of this study. Fourteen undergraduate students agreed to participate in this study. Four sections comprised the jazz ensemble. They were: saxophones, trombones, trumpets, and rhythm, including guitar, bass, piano, drums. The ensemble rehearsed two nights per week, for a total of 3.5 hours.

The comentoring used in this ensemble was not part of any university-wide nor university sponsored program. Instead, the mentoring system was informal, with no direct supervision from the instructor. Students did not participate in any meetings to discuss the teaching process; however, the director established teaching expectations in rehearsals and designed strategies for teaching musical directives such as how to teach intonation, rhythm—time feel or groove, correct notes, and style.

Data

Data collection entailed interviews asking the undergraduate student members for their perspectives relative to the comentoring process. The researchers recorded and transcribed the interviews. The Institutional Review Board from the university in this study approved all methodological procedures.

To code data, the researchers developed a system to identify each interviewee, the interview, and page number. For example, the code assigned to participant in “Interview #1” was “AB,” the next participant was “BC,” etc. The first transcribed interview was coded I-AB1p5 for “Interview with AB number one, page 5.” To assign a pseudonym for each participant, the researchers assigned the first letter of the code to a name that began with the same first letter of the respondent (e.g., Alex for A).

During the transcription process, we coded the interview data to identify emerging themes that would contribute to answering the research questions. We notated the codes in the left hand margin of a Word document using a two-to-three letter coding system based upon the emergent theme, for example “MO” for “Mentoring Each Other.” We then sorted the coded data into separate files with thematic headings such as “friendly atmosphere.” As we reviewed the coded data, we looked for confirming and disconfirming examples in the data record. During this process, we made notes when data appeared to relate to the literature we reviewed for this study. We gradually merged codes together as larger themes like “having a voice in the ensemble” became apparent in the data record. We developed these themes in conjunction with those we analyzed in the literature. For example, we originally thought we were exploring peer mentoring. As themes emerged during analysis, we realized we were actually exploring comentoring. Using the coded data merged together into themes, we then began writing drafts of each section. We revised and merged sections into the final report.

Trustworthiness of the Final Report

We established trustworthiness by reporting and reflecting on our personal biases. This was to ensure that we were not being judgmental about how the student participants performed. Rather, we kept our focus on how the student participants reported learning in this ensemble and the relationships with each other as they learned. During the interview process, we conducted an internal peer review in which we compared the findings to confirm and disconfirm information. In addition, we utilized an external auditor, who reviewed the research questions, data coding, and emergent themes in the data record.

Results

For the participants in this study, comentoring provided an opportunity to rehearse musical details like intonation, rhythm, and note accuracy with each other to improve the performance level of the ensemble. Comentoring occurred in full ensemble rehearsals and in sectional rehearsals. During this process, the participants found that they appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the musical direction of their section and ensemble, and that friendships developed while comentoring. The following discussion includes categories with the themes: a) Mentoring each other; b) Having a “voice” in the ensemble; and c) Camaraderie with comentoring.

Mentoring Each Other

“No one starts at the same level, exactly the same level.” — Ian

In this jazz ensemble, comentoring worked as a two-way exchange as both the older, more experienced players and the younger players reported that they mentored each other. Comentoring occurred for musical reasons during jazz ensemble rehearsals and sectionals. In addition, participants provided verbal directives to members of their own section and also to members of other sections. The younger players indicated that the older players had more knowledge and experience in the Big Band. For Alex, “My section leader has been playing jazz longer than any of us, and is really knowledgeable about the styles, and about the history” (I-AB1p7). Alex added, “These people are not just teachers, they’re also in the band. They’re friends, and they’re mentors because they’ve been doing it longer” (I-AB1p7). Carl, who had played for 10 or 11 years since fifth grade said he “learned skills from the section leader, a very skilled instrumentalist who definitely knows the little things, like intonation, and technique” (I-CD1p1). Eric appreciated that the “senior members of the band” were “willing to teach the

younger guys” and that, “if they solo, afterwards you can ask them about it and they’ll tell you what they are willing to explain” (I-EF1p2). Harold noted that John, a section leader had “been more than a help musically because he’s just an older individual and he’s great to talk to about anything” (I-HI1p3).

The older, more experienced players often mentored their peers and modeled how they wanted a musical section to sound by playing it on their instrument. For example, John, a section leader said, “I’ll basically play it how I would play, or how I want them to play it, and then just try and have them emulate that as best as they can” (I-JK1p2). The younger players could hear musical issues during the rehearsal, but looked to their section leader to be able to articulate how to correct any problems. Brenda stated, “I hear what’s going on, but then I feel like [the section leader] can immediately pinpoint whatever the problem is and then talk about it. So, that’s a great resource, obviously” (I-BC1p6). When Ian provided guidance, he mentioned, “It’s a mindset of remembering what we had gone through, rather than teaching them new things. The key here is not only playing the music but playing it as a section” (I-IJ1p1). For Ian, this could occasionally be frustrating because “During rehearsals I’m reminding them of something that we had gone through in sectionals” (I-IJ1p2). Overall, the section leaders felt comfortable with providing guidance to their sections. As David remarked, “The relationship I have with my section is pretty strong [and] is never antagonistic” (I-DE1p1).

David expressed that a difference existed between “teaching” and “mentoring” the younger players. David considered with mentoring: “There’s a lot more give-and-take because they are your peers. Usually the people I’m playing with that are my peers are closer to the same level where I am at musically” (I-DE1p5). However, David reported when he teaches he “gives

information and then they try to use that information” (I-DE1p5). Further, mentoring for David entailed receiving advice in addition to providing it:

The direction the session goes is different when you’re peer mentoring because it’s not just going exactly where I want it to go. There are some times I can think specifically where you have to make concessions to what someone else wants to do when you’re peer mentoring because you’re kind of both helping each other. (I-DE1p6)

For David, “mentoring is a way of gathering information” (I-DE1p12).

Although the more experienced players indicated they were comfortable with giving advice, at times, however, it was not always easy to provide guidance. David indicated that it could be hard to mentor a younger player when “they don’t necessarily have a good technical facility on the instrument, and I get frustrated with myself not being able to come up with a different way to say it so they understand” (I-DE1p7). The result of this issue, according to David, was, “I don’t have a large enough base to go on to come from as many different directions as I want to” (I-DE1p7). With mentoring, though, David stated:

When I don’t really have anything to say, I’ll just admit that and then say “Hey, do you guys have something?” They almost always have something and it’s always good. It’s refreshing to know that there are other people listening too and they have ideas that are usually always legit. (I-DE1p7)

At first, Carl found it difficult to receive advice from his peers. He remarked, “when I first started this year in jazz band, as [an upper classman], I wasn’t as receptive to constructive criticism from a [lower classman]” (I-CD1p5). Carl, though, began to change his mind when he realized, “Okay, this kid is majoring in music. He obviously knows what he’s talking about” (I-CD1p5). As a result, Carl realized that the younger players were “not out to get me” and that listening to the younger players who provided verbal teaching directives was “the best way to do it as a team” (I-CD1p5).

Thus, the younger players provided input in the Big Band. Section leaders were willing to listen to the younger, less-experienced members of their section. Eric remarked, “If there is

someone I respect more than another person in the group and they mention something then I'm more willing to look into it and check it out" (I-EF1p2). David "never feels uncomfortable" with his section members "saying things to me if they feel like they have something, and they're always listening when I say something to them" (I-DE1p1). Carl, however, was set in his ways and said, "You can't really teach an old dog new tricks" (I-CD1p4). He did acknowledge that he would accept advice "as far as blending in the section and things like that" but not when it came to people telling him about "playing styles" (I-CD1p4).

Having a "voice" in the jazz ensemble

"It's easier to play with someone than to play under someone." — David

For the participants in this study, having an opportunity to voice their opinions about musical details provided an opportunity for them to feel like they were involved in the musical decision making process. Fiona, a younger player, remarked, "I feel like we're all on equal musical levels, and so, even though I'm younger, I feel like they take me just as seriously" (I-FG1p2). David held a similar belief, and stated, "It really affects the way you play when you just relationally have not a subordinate, but an equal role" (I-DE1p10). Although the majority of participants reported that they enjoyed everyone having a voice, issues did exist with mentoring in this jazz ensemble. Eric did not consider mentoring helpful at all times when he coached his section. For example, he referred to mentoring more as "talking" and that he "wouldn't say it's coaching" (I-EF1p1).

Carl considered that, as a section, "Bringing the six of us together as a team was extremely important [for it] takes a lot to bring six different voices who have never played together and put them in twice a week for an hour and a half and make it sound good" (I-

CD1p5). Carl considered the peer mentoring process “difficult [to] put all six into the whole” (I-CD1p5).

With having a “voice” in the section and ensemble, participants said they enjoyed the freedom to make their own decisions. Alex remarked, “It’s really great the way we’re free to interact with each other as a section” (I-AB1p8). He added, “Obviously, the director has control over the decisions, but we’re able to sometimes make our own decisions with the music and the freedom that we’re given is really great and it helps us decide how we want to play the music” (I-AB1p8).

Section leaders appreciated not having to make all of the decisions while mentoring. Ian stated that when he mentored, “I tend to get everyone’s consensus on it, how we’re supposed to play something together, rather than me making all the decisions” (I-IJ1p2). Ian considered this advantageous and said:

I find that if everyone agrees on something, the tendency is for them to remember it after we’ve done it rather than me just giving instructions on what to do, which I do half the time and the other half the time, I’m asking them what they would like, how they would like the section to sound. (I-IJ1p2)

George, a younger player, remarked, “I have a certain point of view that might not necessarily be the same that the section leader might have, or another member of the section might have, but because it’s music, it does still have its say” (I-GH1p2).

George added that he might not “necessarily be right” when he provides musical directives, but that “doesn’t mean I am horribly wrong and shouldn’t speak up” (I-GH1p2). Carl remarked that mentoring in the jazz ensemble was “laid back without being laid back” (I-CD1p8). He added:

I use jazz band as a stress release so I don’t want to come here every day and be told, “Okay, you gotta do this, you gotta do this, you gotta do this.” I think too much mentoring can be a hindrance on a playing style because it makes people not want to come. (I-CD1p8)

He enjoyed the “opportunities each week to do some mentoring, where anyone can talk to anyone else and no one has any problems” (I-CD1p8). For Carl, a non-music major, “bouncing ideas off of each other” helped to create “a low stress environment [which was] definitely a good thing for this kind of atmosphere and what we’re all doing outside of jazz” (I-CD1p8).

The younger players were not hesitant to ask for advice in the jazz ensemble. Eric remarked, “Being one of the more average members of the band, I am not afraid to ask others for their opinions” (I-EF1p4). John, however, stated, “I think it’s all about making that first encounter with someone because a lot of time, if I don’t really understand something, I’m not usually the one to go run to someone who knows how to do it” (I-JK1p5). In addition, participants grew as players from mentoring each other, and with receiving advice. For example, John remarked, “I know that my playing has changed both from giving advice as well as receiving advice” (I-JK1p6).

For some of these participants, having a voice gave them a feeling of ownership in the jazz ensemble. Ian remarked, “I sometimes defer to my section mates on how they want to play something, and sometimes when their opinions are different from mine we play that way instead of the way I want to play,” which for Ian, “produces a better result” (I-IJ1p3). When Ian mentors his peers, “half the time you make decisions about stuff that are obvious and the other time, where you’re shaping the character of the music, maybe you should seek the opinions of your section mates rather than just give out instructions” (I-IJ1p3). As a section leader Ian realized, “You’re the last word on how everything should be played. But it’s important that it’s, on some level, a democratic process” (I-IJ1p3).

Camaraderie with Comentoring

“In the beginning, you kind of shy away from giving advice because you don’t know who the people you’re working with are. But as time goes on, you start to develop a rapport with the group you’re working with, so you’re more able to freely share ideas.” — Carl

In addition to feeling like they had a voice in the ensemble, many of the participants reported that friendships were an important component of the mentoring that occurred in the jazz ensemble. Camaraderie helped to improve the musical level of the ensemble and made the participants more comfortable with mentoring each other.

For many of these participants, developing friendships within their section helped to create an environment for improving their performance skills. Ian said, “The unifying factor here is the interpersonal relationships you have with your section mates that comes into play” (I-IJ1p4). From these interpersonal relationships a sense of camaraderie developed. Fiona said during sectionals “There is the camaraderie that you are able to offer help to each other” (I-FG1p3). For Karl:

It’s a lot easier to reach out and help someone especially if you know them and are friendly with them because you’ll know that they won’t think you’re trying to correct them just because you’re not playing something right or you’re just being a jerk. (I-KL1p6)

Getting to know each other made the participants more comfortable to mentor each other. According to Carl, “In the beginning, it was kind of weird because I didn’t know these people” but as time went on he became more comfortable with mentoring (I-CD1p2).

Camaraderie had its issues, though as, Carl recalled:

I remember when we sat in a sectional one time and two of the members of our section argued back and forth probably five to seven minutes about whether it was important if we were all tuning as a section to actually use a tuner or not. And these two argued and the other four of us just sat there and twiddled our thumbs while they settled this argument. (I-CD1p3)

Camaraderie extended beyond the rehearsals and sectionals. Harold stated, “We’ve gotten together a lot outside of rehearsal. We’ve played, but we’ve hung out for almost the same amount of time. I think that’s really fun and a great experience” (I-HIp3). For Ian:

I think mentoring is improved when the section spends more time with each other outside the ensemble. The longer the ensemble plays together, obviously a connection develops between the members, and mentoring works more efficiently because there’s a certain sense of musical trust between the musicians. (I-IJ1p3)

Harold learned to improve his jazz playing skills from simply “hanging out” and often asked his peers for “advice and I think that’s the most helpful, the non-musical aspect of it” (I-HI1p2).

Monthly jam sessions held on campus, which were not a requirement for the jazz ensemble members, fostered camaraderie. The students in the jazz ensemble encouraged each other to try new experiences in the genre. Brenda said that encouragement from John, a more experienced player, who “made me play,” was “extremely helpful” with developing her jazz improvisation skills (I-BC1p5). This was a breakthrough for Brenda, because she said that cliques existed at these jam sessions and the encouragement from John helped her to break through this perceived barrier.

Camaraderie extended outside the rehearsals for musical reasons. Joe helped Eric to develop habits for practicing. Eric said, “One time, after rehearsal, Joe took me down to explain, firstly, a manner of practicing to improve efficiency by taking solos apart” (I-EF1p4). According to Eric:

It was nice because it gave me an opportunity to hear some of the stuff, try it out for myself, and get comments on it. Outside of the band you don’t get much feedback on solos. It was a nice experience. (I-EF1p4)

Discussion

For the participants in this study, comentoring functioned as a platform for a two-way exchange of musical ideas between the older, more experienced players, and the younger players

in the jazz ensemble. Many reported they were involved in both the teaching and learning processes. Mentoring occurred during rehearsals of the full ensemble and in sectionals. This type of mentoring was often verbal, in which students communicated with each other how to improve their intonation, rhythm skills, and playing their parts together. In addition to verbal mentoring, students often modeled how they wanted musical passages to sound by playing their instruments. This confirmed findings by Goodrich (2007), who reported that the majority of mentoring that occurred in the jazz ensemble in that study was for musical reasons.

At the onset of this study, mentoring was more hierarchical in structure, as the older players, usually section leaders, provided advice for musical directives to their respective sections. The hierarchies evaporated as the younger players began to offer advice to the older players and a two-way exchange of musical ideas between the older and younger players began to emerge. Participants like Carl realized that younger players, especially if they were music majors and taking lessons, could help when working together as a team to improve their section's level of musical performance. In this sense, comentoring was a dynamic process that took on self-sustaining capabilities. The more the mentee learned, the more likely they were able to relay information to the mentor.

Peer coaching, a prominent component of comentoring, was present among the participants in this study. According to Mullen (2005), peer coaching, within a support group context, "can help members cope with and transcend issues often attributed to one-to-one mentoring" (p. 74). Consistent with Mullen's research, the student participants worked together to solve musical issues. The peer coaching was not always an easy process, however, during the course of this study. For example, David found it difficult to mentor younger players if they did not have the technical facility to play their parts. None of the participants in this study were well-

established teachers, and most were not music majors, and often lacked the pedagogy to provide musical directives to their section. Despite some frustrations among the older players, however, they eventually embraced the idea of receiving advice from the younger players.

The literature indicated that clarification of roles in the mentoring process was essential for a successful experience among the mentor and mentee (Colvin 2007; Colvin & Ashman, 2010; Stader, 2001). The mentoring system in this ensemble functioned effectively even though it was informal in structure. Although Colvin indicated that students are not always aware of their roles in the mentoring process, the participants in this current study indicated that they were aware of their roles in this ensemble, yet they felt comfortable providing musical directives when needed, regardless of the role they played. The younger players indicated that they indeed had a voice in the ensemble as the atmosphere allowed them to contribute to the musical direction of the jazz ensemble. Older players, such as Carl, who were not favorable towards anyone coaching them about styles in jazz, realized that allowing younger players to provide musical direction helped to establish teamwork, and thus improved the performing level of the ensemble. John considered the performing level in his section to improve because he gave and received advice. Thus, comentoring in this study was a process in which students could serve as both a mentor and a mentee simultaneously. Depending upon the specific musical situation, a student could serve as a mentor for some issues (e.g., jazz style) but in turn be a mentee for other issues (e.g., proper technique for intonation).

One of the primary benefits of comentoring for the participants in this study was the camaraderie that developed. For these participants, camaraderie helped them to improve their level of musical performance in addition to helping them to feel more comfortable with mentoring each other. For example, both Fiona and Brenda indicated they were comfortable with

expressing their musical ideas and contributing to the ensemble. Friendships in this jazz ensemble developed when the participants helped each other to address musical details within both rehearsals and sectionals. Carl indicated that the rapport that developed with his peers made it easier to share musical ideas with each other. Camaraderie enabled younger students to ask for help. Harold reported that simply “hanging out” with his section made him feel more comfortable to ask for guidance.

Camaraderie among the students in the jazz ensemble had its issues, though, as Carl remarked that sometimes the friendly atmosphere resulted in too much talking during sectionals, instead of getting work accomplished. Yet, despite some issues with camaraderie, overall the participants considered the friendships and friendly atmosphere as helpful towards establishing musical trust between each other. The participants were more comfortable playing in front of each other and making mistakes because they had developed friendships. This is similar to a study by Foster (2013), in which the participants reported a heightened sense of comprehension of learning course content due to the friendly atmosphere via the social interactions in a piano lab. Mullen (2005) indicated that friendships comprised an important component in the mentoring process. Madsen (2011), who found that the most important aspect of mentoring included the time spent together between the students stated, “In some instances, bonding occurred to the point where college students felt close enough to give comfort and advice in these sessions” (p. 51). The friendships that developed among these students in the jazz ensemble during the mentoring process superseded the musical objectives of rehearsals and sectionals in this study.

Implications and Recommendations

The evidence from this study indicated that comentoring can improve the performance level of a music ensemble. As participants assumed both teaching and learning roles, the two-way exchange of ideas helped to elevate the performance level of their respective section and ultimately the entire jazz ensemble. Further, the camaraderie that developed during the process of comentoring helped to create an atmosphere conducive for learning, and a desire to improve the musical performance level of the jazz ensemble.

Although the comentoring in this jazz ensemble functioned well, it may have been successful, in part, because of the age and maturity level of the students. The students in this study attended a private university with high admission standards. It may be more difficult for teachers of younger, less mature students (e.g., elementary and secondary levels) to implement and maintain an informal comentoring system within their music ensemble. Although an examination of gender and race was not a part of the research design for this study, comentoring could assist teachers of music ensembles with the creation of “a platform for social justice and racial, ethnic, and sexual identifications” (Mullen, 2005, p. 74). Thus, comentoring could help underrepresented populations to feel more comfortable with providing their voice to the musical direction of the ensemble. Based upon the results of this particular study, teachers should encourage all of their students to contribute musical ideas in the ensemble to help establish social connections that in turn can help to elevate the performance level of the ensemble.

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Andrew Goodrich (andrewg@bu.edu) is an Assistant Professor of Music in the Music Education Department at Boston University. He currently teaches a doctoral level qualitative research course, instrumental teaching methods, and a jazz history course. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music Education with a Jazz Concentration from Arizona State University and a Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Montana. Andrew presents research at the international and national levels and has been published in journals including the *Journal of Research in Music Education*, the *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, and the *International Journal of Community Music*.

Jonathan Kracht (jonkracht@gmail.com) works as a pipe organ technician for Emery Brothers Inc. in Allentown, PA where his responsibilities include tuning, maintenance, and restoration. He holds degrees in Mechanical Engineering including a B.S. from Johns Hopkins University and a M.S. and Ph.D. from Boston University where he conducted research investigating biomedical applications of ultrasound. Jon is also an active musician who's performed regularly in small and large ensembles primarily within the jazz idiom.

Josh McDonald (jjwmc@bu.edu) is the Coordinator of the Jazz Ensembles at Boston University, where he directs three combos and teaches a jazz history course entitled "Jazz Now: a look at the #BAM movement." He completed his undergraduate work at the Smittcamp Family Honors College at California State University, Fresno. Josh has played trumpet throughout the United States. His big band compositions and small group compositions have been performed in the U.S., Singapore, and Germany.

Colin Sapp (csapp@berklee.edu) is a recording artist and an Assistant Professor at Berklee College of Music and a Lecturer in Jazz at Boston University. He teaches various guitar styles, improvisation and jazz, fusion and pop/rock ensembles. He holds a Master of Music in education from Boston University and a Bachelor of Music in performance from Berklee College of Music. He has most recently recorded "Songs Without Words" with the group *Choose to Find*, "The Entire City" with James Wolpert from NBC's *The Voice* and is currently recording his third solo album titled "Infinite Out--The Human Analog."