

The Prevalence of the Use of Music as a Teaching Tool Among Selected American Classroom Educators: A Preliminary Examination

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Background

The importance of music education in American schools is well established, with 93% of Americans agreeing that music should be a part of a well-rounded education (Harris, 2005). Results of ongoing national surveys for 2009-2010 (the most recent data available) indicated that 94% of reporting public elementary schools offered instruction in music. Exactly who provides that music instruction is unclear, leading to ongoing discourse about the varying contributions of arts specialists, classroom teachers, and non-certified supplemental teachers as delineated in a recent position paper by the State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education (Richerme, Shuler & McCaffrey, 2012). Among elementary classroom teachers (non-music specialists), 6% indicated they taught music as a separate subject, while 92% incorporated music instruction in other subject areas (National Center for Education Statistics, May 2011); thus most school music instruction appears to be in the hands of music specialists.

Students preparing to teach in the elementary classroom (elementary education majors) in American colleges and universities typically take a music class (sometimes two) as part of their preparation. The content of these preservice classes for non-music majors often includes personal musical skill development, music literacy, ways to teach music, and occasionally strategies to use music as a tool to teach other subjects (Berke & Colwell, 2004; Hash, 2010; McCrary, 1999; Price & Burnsed, 1989). The specifics of integrating music into other subject matters have been of interest to researchers (Colwell, 2008; Giles & Frego, 2004; Kelly, 1998; Saunders & Baker, 1991; Whitaker, 1996). In an often-cited qualitative study, Bresler (1995) identified four types of integration styles ranging from *Subservient* in which arts serve to teach

other subjects, to *Co-equal, Cognitive Integration* in which arts objectives have equal importance with other subjects.

Subsequently, other researchers have used Bresler's terminology to evaluate whether music goals were being taught in arts integration situations (Colwell, 2008; Giles & Frego, 2004; Hash, 2010). Following that same philosophical direction, Barrett (2001) advised maintaining musical integrity in interdisciplinary settings. Fewer researchers examined music as a tool to teach other subjects, what Bresler (1995) called *Subservient Integration*, although some (Colwell, 2008; Giles & Frego, 2004) mentioned that the term was not meant to be pejorative. An examination of the literature revealed that, although not referencing Bresler's terminology, most researchers generally focused on music as subject matter when examining music taught by classroom teachers. Further emphasizing the focus on music as subject matter, Abril and Gault (2005) surveyed elementary classroom educators' belief in the importance of musical goals, while Kelly (1998) examined awareness of state and national music standards among preschool teachers.

Despite the pervasiveness of university music courses for preservice classroom teachers, relatively few researchers, with the exception of Giles and Frego (2004), Hash (2010), and Kelly (1998), have examined how music is actually used in the general classroom after teachers leave the university. These three studies focused on evaluating the use of music as a subject, and the teachers they surveyed represented relatively small geographic areas or those trained at a specific university. Thus we designed the present study to examine how in-service classroom teachers use music, while purposefully removing the factor of teaching music as a subject. In addition we sought to broaden the geographic reach of our survey.

Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine: 1) To what extent do classroom teachers use music in their classroom? 2) Among those who use music, how and in what settings do they use music? 3) What materials and resources are found to be most useful? and 4) Where do classroom teachers acquire musical materials and strategies?

Method

We designed a study in which in-service classroom teachers were questioned regarding their use of music in their classrooms. We debated whether to use completely open-ended questions or to offer menus with a selection of possible responses. Ultimately we decided to create an original survey using a menu of predetermined items in order to evaluate the response of each participant to identical questions. As a way of acquiring more open-ended responses not guided by our pre-determined lists, each participant was also invited to a more in-depth phone interview to explain and expand on his/her original survey responses.

Participants

We purposefully sought to exclude classroom teachers who taught music as a subject matter to emphasize our research questions pertaining to the use of music rather than the teaching of music. Thus we limited our consideration to schools that had had an experienced music specialist on staff for at least 3 years. We reasoned that in settings in which music was taught as a subject by music specialists, classroom teachers might feel less pressured to teach music objectives (Colwell, 2008), thus allowing us to examine music used as a classroom assistive tool. To accomplish our goal of including only schools that had a history of music specialists, we contacted music teachers known to us, identifying teachers from different areas of the country and different socio-economic settings. Each music educator we contacted was asked to forward our survey to the classroom teachers in their schools or districts with a scripted invitation from themselves and us. Thus the resulting responses constituted a purposeful sample of convenience rather than a random sample. This methodology did not allow us to track exactly how many teachers were contacted, so our response rates were unknown.

Ultimately, classroom teachers from 12 schools ($N = 79$) from diverse parts of the United States participated (five elementary schools in Texas = 39 respondents; three Georgia elementary schools = 21; a single elementary school in South Carolina = 14; a single Oregon elementary school = 3; and elementary schools in unnamed states = 2).

The Survey

A researcher-designed survey was created and then evaluated by experienced elementary music educators ($N = 3$). Modifications to wording and content were made until consensus was reached. Specific questions and menu items for possible ways to use music were based on advice from experienced elementary music educators, classroom teachers, the researchers' own experience, widely-available texts for classroom teacher music classes (Boyer & Rozmajzl, 2012; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2013; Fallin & Tower, 2011), and studies cited in the review of literature. Institutional Review Board permission was received from both researchers' institutions, and all informed consent protocols were followed.

The resulting survey was entered online using SurveyMonkey and a link was emailed to all participants via the music specialists in their schools. The survey consisted of ten questions requiring short answers or checkboxes from a menu of possible answers. The survey solicited demographic information (grades taught, years of experience, previous music experiences, university music courses taken), how often music was used in the classroom (daily, weekly, monthly, rarely, never), what types of music were used (children's songs, popular songs from CDs/radio, classical recordings, etc.), and, most importantly for the purposes of this study, how music was used (transitions between activities, reading stories, counting games, language songs, science lessons, energy release, background for quiet time, etc.). The survey appears in Table 1. A final question asked respondents to include their email addresses indicating their willingness to discuss their use of music in more detail via a phone conversation. Fifty of the 79 did so. We contacted the 50 and asked them to call us at a prearranged time; interviews were then held with 4 respondents. This paper reports the result of the survey responses ($N = 79$) and interviews ($N = 4$) collected to date as a window into the preliminary findings.

Table 1. Survey Questions: Use of Music in the Elementary Classroom

1. Number of years in the teaching profession?
2. Name of school(s) and grade(s) you are currently teaching?

3. Overall, how often do you use music in your classroom?
Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never
4. How often do your students sing songs in your class?
Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never
5. How often to you let students bring recordings to class?
Daily Weekly Monthly Rarely Never
6. What kinds of recorded music (if any) do you plan in your classroom?
(Check all that apply)
Currently Popular
Popular Music of the Past
Classical Vocal
Classical Instrumental
Children's Songs
Musical Theater
Music from Movies
Jazz
Music from Other Countries
Other (please specify)
7. How do you use music as a teaching tool? (check all that apply)
Music as a reward for behavior or classwork
Music to get students' attention
Music as transitions between activities
Music as background for quiet time
Music for energy release
Songs for classroom management (clean up songs, get-in-a-circle songs, etc.)
Music as a break from academic activities
Music to teach concepts in Social Studies
Social Studies: Music from another time or culture
Social Studies: Music representing other geographic areas
Music to teach concepts in Language Arts
Language Arts: Music to read stories
Language Arts: Music for language learning
Music to teach concepts in Mathematics (counting games, etc.)
Music to teach concepts in Science
Science: Music to explain acoustics and sound
Science: Songs about science (rain cycle song, etc.)
Music to aid in memorization (alphabet song times tables, names of states, etc.)
Other (please specify)
8. Where do you find music to use in your classroom? (check all that apply)
Music I learned as a K-12 student
Music I learned from a collegiate teacher preparation course
Music teacher at your school
Fellow non-music teachers
YouTube
Internet
Books

Movies/TV/Radio/CD
Other (please explain)

9. Did you take courses in music or participate in music? (check all that apply)

- As part of my collegiate teacher preparation
- One music course
- Two music courses
- More than two music courses
- In high school or middle school
- Outside of school
- Did not take music classes in college or secondary school

10. We would like to talk at length with selected classroom teachers who use music in frequent and innovative ways in their classrooms. Would you be willing to talk further with us about your use of music in your classroom? If so, please list your email and we will contact you about the possibility of further interview details.

Telephone Interviews

Phone interviews consisted of a list of researcher-designed, open-ended questions to identify and categorize specific strategies, websites, songs, and activities used by these teachers as specified in Table 2.

Table 2. Script of Semi-Structured Phone Interview Questions

Overview

How do you use music in your classroom?
Where or when do you use music in your classroom?
What kinds of music do you use? Why?

Teaching Techniques

What do you think is your most successful way to integrate music into your classroom?
(Please share some examples that have worked for you.)
What do you wish you knew more about when trying to integrate music into your classroom?
Why do you (or do you not) think music is a valuable tool in your classroom?

Musical Sources

What is your own musical background?
How did/do you find out about different ways to use music?
(Prior Training, colleagues, any specific websites, etc.)
Do you have any favorite music websites?
What criteria do you use to select music for your classroom?
Would you use music more often if you had more training?

College Courses

Were your college music courses helpful?
How could college music courses more adequately address your needs in the classroom?

If you were to give advice on how to use music effectively in the classroom, what would you say?

Conclusion

What else would you like us to know about your use of music as an educator?

The open-ended questions were repeated for each interview, and generally guided the conversation, but we encouraged respondents to simply tell us about their experiences using music, creating a semi-structured environment (Wengraf, 2001). Phone conversations were audio-recorded and comments subsequently scripted in order to apply qualitative techniques to identify emerging categories and areas of contrasts and similarities among responses. Scripted data were analyzed using a constant-comparative model (Merriam, 2009), allowing continual comparison of a particular interview with the others.

Results

Written Surveys

Demographics. Teaching experience averaged 11.9 years, ranging from 1 to 35 years. All grades pre-K – 6th were represented (Pre k – 1st = 26, 2nd-3rd = 18, 4th-6th = 17; no grade mentioned = 15). Subjects taught included general classroom (58), special education (4), gifted and talented (2), and English as a second language (1).

Frequency of Music Use. The daily use of music was reported by 53.2% of the classroom teachers; 2.5% reported never using music. A total of 73.5% reported they used music daily or weekly; and 19% used it rarely or never. Details appear in Figure 1. Results of specific questions regarding frequency of singing indicated that 63.3% sang daily or weekly in class; 22.8% rarely or never sang.

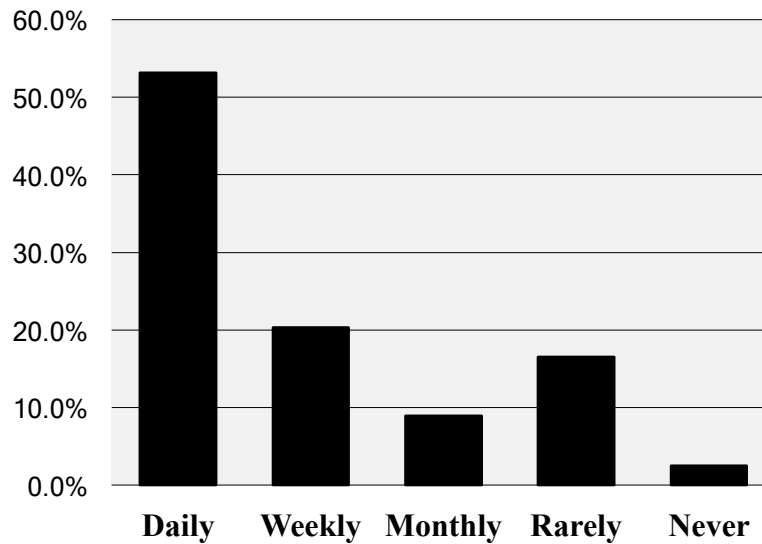


Figure 1. Frequency with which classroom teachers ($N = 79$) indicated they used music in their classrooms.

Music as a teaching tool. Respondents could check as many items as applicable from the list provided. Results indicated that respondents ($N = 79$) selected 565 ways they used music in their classroom (with a mean of 7.15 responses per teacher). The most frequently mentioned uses for music in the classroom included music for quiet time (69.6%), music to aid memorization (60.8%), music to get students' attention (51.9%), music to teach concepts in mathematics (48.1%), music as transition between activities (45.6%), songs for classroom management (44.3%), music to teach concepts in language arts (44.3%), songs about science (39.2%), music to teach concepts in social studies (32.9%), music to read stories (31.6%), music to teach concepts in science (30.4%), and music for language learning (30.4%). All other responses were checked by fewer than 30% of the respondents. Details appear in Table 3.

Table 3. Use of music as a teaching tool. Respondents (N = 79) selected 565 ways they used music. Mean number of responses = 7.15 per teacher.

How You Use Music in the Classroom?	Response Percent	Response Count
Music as a reward for behavior or classwork	24.1%	19
Music to get students' attention	51.9%	41
Music as transitions between activities	45.6%	36
Music as background for quiet time	69.6%	55
Music for energy release	51.9%	41
Songs for classroom management	44.3%	35
Music as a break from academic activities	30.4%	24
Music to teach concepts in Social Studies	32.9%	26
Social Studies: Music from another time or culture	24.1%	19
Social Studies: Music representing other geographic areas	22.8%	18
Music to teach concepts in Language Arts	44.3%	35
Language Arts: Music to read stories	31.6%	25
Language Arts: Music for language learning	30.4%	24
Music to teach concepts in Mathematics	48.1%	38
Music to teach concepts in Science	30.4%	24
Science: Music to explain acoustics and sound	19.0%	15
Science: Songs about science	39.2%	31
Music to aid in memorization	60.8%	48
Other	13.9%	11

Where do teachers find music? The largest numbers of teachers found music on the internet (49.4%) or from movies/TV/radio/CD (49.4%). Others selected music they themselves learned as K-12 students (44.3%), YouTube (34.2%), and from fellow classroom teachers (30.4%). All other sources of music, including music from the music specialist at their school (24.1%) and music they learned in college classes (29.1%), were checked by fewer than 30% of the respondents (see Table 4 for complete results).

Table 4. Sources of music for the classroom.

Where do you find music to use in your classroom?	Response Percent	Response Count
Music I learned as a K-12 student	44.3%	35
Music I learned from a collegiate teacher preparation course	29.1%	23
Music teacher	24.1%	19
Fellow non-music teachers	30.4%	24

YouTube	34.2%	27
Internet	49.4%	39
Books	22.8%	18
Movies/TV/Radio/CD	49.4%	39
Other (please explain)	30.4%	24

Kinds of recorded music. Teachers indicated that they typically chose the following types of music: children’s songs (67.1%), classical instrumental (64.6%), music popular in the past (39.2%), and currently popular music (30.4%). All other responses were checked by fewer than 30% of the respondents. When asked if they allowed students to bring recordings, the vast majority indicated that they rarely or never did (91.1%). Few (3.8%) allowed students to bring recordings daily or weekly.

Personal music experience. Respondents indicated that they themselves had music experience in middle or high school (50.6%), as part of collegiate teacher preparation (46.8%), or outside of school (26.6%). Nearly one in five respondents indicated they had never had music classes (19.0%). See Figure 2.

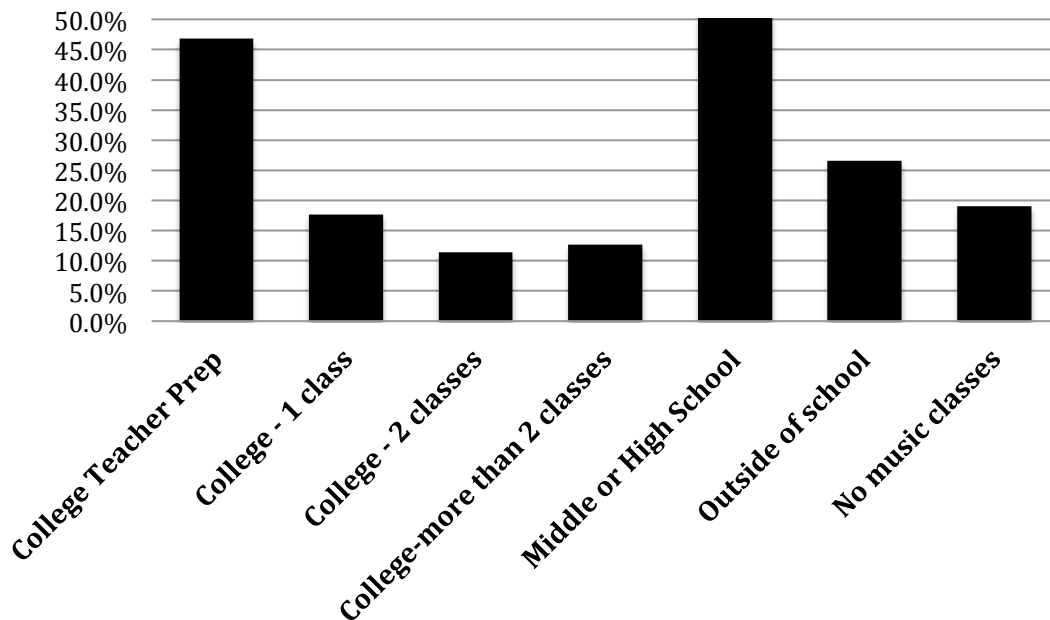


Figure 2. Personal sources of music experience.

Telephone Interviews

Telephone conversations ($n = 4$) confirmed and extended the survey responses. Interviews lasted between 12 and 38 minutes and were largely guided by how much the respondent wished to talk. Telephone respondents were uniformly enthusiastic about their use of music and its value in their classroom.

All interviewees mentioned using music because their own teachers had used it while they themselves were in elementary school. A Texas kindergarten teacher on a military base with a transient population explained:

Don't laugh at me, but I can still recite things that Ms. Taylor taught me in fourth grade because she taught them to me in a song. And I can still sing my prepositions from seventh grade because they taught them to me in songs. To me, it's just like I could always remember stuff so it's logical to assume that it works.

All four gave examples of using music. For example, a Texas third grade teacher from a large urban district explained:

I make CDs of music and put songs on them that the kids would like to check out. I have them high five each other when I put a clip of the song on. Well, all I know is that it brings them back. If it looks like they're getting bored, or it looks like they're getting tired then I usually just use (music) to get them energized.

Three of the four created their own songs to fit curricular needs (chiefly adding words to known tunes) and sang several of them during the phone conversation. None of the respondents felt their college preparation music classes were helpful. A Georgia fifth grade teacher in an urban setting was typical: "Well, (long pause) I guess I must have had such a class (long pause). I just don't remember anything from that class. Nothing I can possibly use now anyway."

Discussion

The current study was designed to explore the use of music by elementary classroom teachers who presumably did not teach music as a subject because their schools had a music specialist. We asked to what extent classroom teachers used music in their classrooms and found that only two (2.5%) never used music and 42 of the 79 respondents (53.2%) used music daily. Such responses are even higher than the National Center for Education Statistics (2011) data that indicated that 92% of classroom teachers reported incorporating music in other subjects. Please note that it is possible that those replying to our survey might have tended to be more positive about the use of music. Teachers who did not to use music simply might not have completed the survey.

The respondents indicated that they sang frequently. The fact that 41.8% reported singing songs daily, as compared to 53.2% who used music daily, indicates the extent to which music other than singing was used. Note that approximately one in five (22.8%) sang rarely or never. Such findings seem consistent with Kelly's (1998) determination that his preschool in-service teachers found that the most useful pre-service instruction involved movement activities, rather than singing.

Perhaps the most important question addressed in this study concerned exactly how the teachers used music. The strategies and methods used varied considerably, but some consensus was apparent. Teachers indicated that they used music as background (70%), memorization (61%), cue for attention (52%), energy release (52%), transitions (46%), and classroom management (44%). Note that these most frequently chosen ways of using music might be categorized under Bresler's (1995) *Affective Style of Integration*, meaning music that is used to change mood, affect, or classroom environment as explained by Hash (2010) and Giles and Frego (2004). Other ways to use music included music to teach specific courses such as mathematics (48%), songs about science (39%), and social studies (24%). These uses could be categorized under Bresler's (1995) *Subservient Approach to Integration* in which music is used primarily as a tool to teach something else. No teachers mentioned using music as Bresler's *Social Integration Approach* that involves using the arts for school and community events, nor as Bresler's *Co-Equal-Cognitive Style* in which music and a subject are both taught with equal importance (Colwell, 2008).

Materials and resources used included heavy reliance on web-based media (internet, YouTube) and recordings. Interestingly, ideas for the use of music often came from the teachers' own experiences as children (44%), while many fewer mentioned using materials from a college class (29%) or from the music specialist in their school (24%). Remember that teachers could check as many of these resources as were applicable. The lesser importance of college methods classes was supported by responses to telephone conversations, in which all teachers mentioned that such courses were not applicable and were not memorable.

These findings were surprising to us as instructors of such courses. If our courses are truly not useful and not memorable, and if only 6% of classroom teachers report they are teaching music as a subject (National Center for Education Statistics, May 2011), then thoughtful curricular revisions would appear to be in order. This conclusion concurs with Giles and Frego (2005) and Saunders and Baker (1991) who identified a discrepancy in what is being taught and

what in-service teachers found useful. We intend for results of this particular study to generate methodology for a larger, more comprehensive examination of this issue. We anticipate that recommendations for instructors of university classes for non-music majors, as well as implications for further research, will be products of this research.

Based on these preliminary results, curricular suggestions that might address the findings of this study include: Building on what the in-service classroom teachers themselves learned as children (Apfelstadt, 1989); using more models of classroom teachers using music; placing less emphasis on music literacy and more on using music to teach other subjects (Giles & Fredo, 2005); focus more or continue to focus on singing, since the majority in our study indicated they sang daily or weekly; providing practice in using music to teach classroom subjects (Colwell, 2008); focusing less on skills needed to teach music as a subject matter, and more on working effectively with a music specialist (Giles & Frego, 2004); focusing more on building personal musical confidence and access to resources (Abril & Gault, 2005; Apfelstadt, 1989); providing opportunities for pre-service classroom teachers to use the internet to find high quality and useful musical examples; and making every class more memorable by using high energy and the most exciting musical examples.

Clearly further research is indicated. Curricular revision based on the responses of 79 classroom teachers is questionable. A wider sampling is called for, but the consensus among these 79 deserves thoughtful consideration. Do we teach music literacy during what is often a single semester course with these young teachers because we believe that is the information they will need? Or do we teach music literacy because we know how to teach that? Do we expect them to be able to read music after a single semester but offer music majors, who enter our institutions knowing how to read music, four to six semesters of music theory? As mentioned by Hash (2010), curricular re-examination as well as continued research is indicated.

One of our in-service interviewees with 31 years of teaching experience with young children offered this advice to young classroom teachers entering the profession:

They have to not be afraid to use their voice. I can't run to put a CD on every time I need a transition song. But they could start by finding a few CDs with children's music that they really, really like and think would be helpful in their teaching and start with that. And become really familiar with those instead of just trying to get tons and tons of different songs and not be adept at any of them. It might be a good idea to provide them a hot list of websites for them to choose. Start making a list, their own little file of songs. For instance, when it's time to clean up...there are tons and tons of songs out there, but none of them fit the exact directions for my class. So I just made up my own.

Keywords

in-service teachers, classroom teachers, non-music majors, music integration

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