

The Middle School Music Exploratory Experience in School District #61

by

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The Middle School Music Exploratory Experience in School District #61:
The Teachers' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' perceptions of middle school music exploratory classes in School District #61. The study utilized semi-structured interviews with 6 teachers and 3 administrators in a multiple case study. Participants were asked their perceptions of the original intent, current reality, benefits, and challenges of exploratory courses. The study found that there are middle school students in the district not being offered music exploratory courses due to student enrolment and principal selection of exploratory offerings. The curriculum and assessment are determined and developed by the individual teachers. A variety of topics are being taught including world music, ukulele, guitar, song-writing, and popular music. Teachers favour the use of current technology. Challenges included reluctant students, classroom management, a lack of planning time, and the number of report cards completed. Findings showed that music exploratory courses are effective in middle schools, engaging students in a relaxed teaching atmosphere, with individual and interdependent learning, creativity, and 'hands-on' learning. It is recommended that a resource pool be created with curriculum and assessment tools, that further dialogue occurs on assessment and the course goals, and that the music exploratory program be expanded across School District #61.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my mentors, Dave Dunnet, Joyce Kopan, and Karen Snowsell, who inspired so many students and student teachers with their passion, knowledge, and commitment to music and music education. Thank you.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Rationale

I remember when I was interviewed for the position of music director at my school a few years ago. The overall atmosphere was positive, with the administrators and I agreeing on many aspects of music education as it related to students in Grades 6 through 8. During the course of the interview, however, I was asked my opinion on music exploratory classes. I immediately became defensive as I tried to determine their motivation. Were they looking for my thoughts on course offerings? Were they asking about assessment? Did they want to hear my philosophy on mandatory music for all? Thankfully, the principal followed up by asking what courses I would offer if I could teach anything during the music exploratory block. There was an immediate sense of relief at the realization that the administrators were primarily looking at course offerings rather than philosophy.

Music teachers in School District #61 have varied reactions when asked about music exploratory classes. Some teachers will roll their eyes and sigh, some offer a haggard look as they recount the numerous stories about unengaged students, some will immediately begin a discussion on the merits of assessment in music exploratory blocks, and some will smile broadly and start discussing a class or topic that is going exceptionally well. These assorted reactions are symptomatic of the diversity of offerings for and varied levels of success with music exploratory classes.

There is no set formula or curriculum available for music teachers with regards to exploratory options. Topics vary from school to school and teacher to teacher (Brazee, 2000; MENC, 1994). Exploratory options in School District #61 include offerings such as world music, ukulele, jazz combos, history of rock and roll, technology in music, composition, and the more recent trend of beginning guitar. My own offerings of composition, guitar, and music technology have been developed primarily through trial and error, by gauging the interest of the students along with the shift in my own thinking about the purpose behind music exploratory classes.

The success of these offerings appears to be dependent on the ability of the teacher to engage the students. What works for one teacher may not work for another. One class of students may appreciate the topic or unit, and the next class may not. The challenge for me then, was to determine what had been offered in the school previously, and what would work now.

There were many challenges in determining the direction of these classes. There was no training at the university with regards to exploratory classes, nor during my high school practicum. The research on exploratory classes was slim, and what research existed focused primarily on course offerings alone (Anfara and Brown, 2000). Where then, could I find information regarding the ideas, philosophy and purpose behind music exploratory classes?

Exploratory classes are an integral part of the District #61 Middle School model. In 2000, a district committee was created to research the Middle School Model, which was then implemented across the district over the next 6 years as

part of a district-wide reconfiguration. This reconfiguration resulted in geographic families of schools incorporating elementary (K-5), middle (6-8), and secondary schools (9-12).

In the past, music programs for middle years students (Grades 6-8) in Victoria included general music classes, performance ensemble programs, and often 'pull-out' instrumental programs. In many schools in the district, general music was taught as a year-round course offering, with students being able to receive a solid foundation of singing, music listening, and analytical skills. In addition, students could take elective band, choir, or string instruction. Since reconfiguration, students electing not to take performance ensembles such as band, strings, and choir now receive only one unit of music each year, approximately 6 to 10 weeks in length. This pattern is routine in many jurisdictions (Hinckley, 1994; Myers 1994; Williamson, 1994).

The challenges in determining what to offer my students during these short mini-courses became immense and overwhelming. For the sake of survival, I had to focus on curriculum first, simply to be able to teach something to these students the following week. Since that time, I have been struggling with the evolution of these programs, contemplating questions such as:

- 1) What is the purpose of exploratory music courses?
- 2) What is the goal for both educators and students with regards to music exploratory classes?
- 3) Should the concepts and skills of past general music courses be part of the exploratory program curriculum?

- 4) What can be offered that will appeal to the full range of students?
- 5) Should there be an opportunity to explore a specific instrument, style, or topic within music education?
- 6) Should there be a focus on topics that appeal to students with relevance to the current musical offerings in society?
- 7) Can all of the British Columbia (BC) Government Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) be taught in such a short time-line?
- 8) Should students be assigned a letter grade for exploratory classes?
- 9) How many projects or assignments should be offered?

The school where I teach is an exception in my district, in that letter grades are assigned for exploratory classes. Although this adds additional work during report card times, it does assist with classroom management for the few students who do not believe in participating during exploratory classes (Anfara & Brown, 2000). Many schools in our district provide various forms of assessment for these classes, and most of the teachers struggle with unengaged students in these mandatory settings.

A positive outcome of these exploratory classes is that they offer the teacher a unique opportunity to connect with students in a manner that classroom teachers cannot (Garvin, 1994). Students in exploratory classes may have the ability to move around, to choose their learning resources and to work in a more relaxed atmosphere than a traditional classroom or ensemble setting. This allows teachers to work with and relate to students individually. Exploratory subjects can inspire students in ways that core subject areas cannot (Brazee,

2000). This inspiration may take the form of an instrument, a style of music, or a software program. A number of my students, for example, have purchased guitars to continue with the instrument after the exploratory class was over. Music teachers can play a pivotal role in connecting musically with a wide constituency of students, and exploratory classes can be a vehicle for achieving this goal. My interest in designing and refining music exploratory classes led me to investigate the practices of some of my middle school music colleagues in School District #61.

Research Purpose

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore educators' perceptions of music exploratory classes in School District #61. To provide for a wide view, I determined to conduct semi-structured interviews with a varied group of teachers, as well as district administrators. I wanted to discuss their perceptions of the intent, current reality, benefits, and challenges of exploratory courses, with a specific focus on music exploratory courses. I planned to analyze the data for emergent themes and trends that contribute to an understanding of the current status of middle school music exploratory classes in this district.

Research Questions

My research questions stemmed from my research purpose and are constructed to answer four areas of inquiry: appropriate fit and intent of music exploratory classes, teacher preparation, curricular models, and assessment.

The lack of research provides an opportunity to take a step back and see if the music exploratory model fits well within the middle school system. The

middle school model is relatively new to British Columbia and both teachers and administrators are working through the challenges of curriculum, timetabling, and school culture inherent with middle schools. These schools were originally developed to try to address developmental issues of a specific age group of children.

- 1) Do music exploratory courses meet the developmental needs of middle school students?
- 2) Do music exploratory courses appeal to middle school students?
- 3) What was the original intent of these courses?
- 4) Are music teachers in this district aware of the goals and philosophy of exploratory courses?
- 5) Are music exploratory courses providing a solid foundation in music?

Music teachers have had to teach these courses with little exposure to specialized music exploratory training at any level.

- 6) How are teachers approaching the exploratory model?
- 7) Can traditional performance courses such as band, choir, and strings operate in conjunction with music exploratory courses?

As there is no set curriculum for middle school music exploratory classes, teachers need to develop their own music exploratory classes, units, and projects.

- 8) Are courses being offered in specific areas or skills?

- 9) Are teachers approaching music exploratory courses in a sequential manner?
- 10) Are teachers choosing curriculum based on the developmental needs of the children?

Finally, the combination of the new middle school model with teachers who have received minimal training may result in a wide variety of assessment within music exploratory courses.

- 11) Is there a standard requirement for assessment across the district?
- 12) How are teachers approaching the challenges of assessment?
- 13) Are teachers addressing prescribed government music standards?

Delimitations

This project focused on participants from School District #61 that have been involved in the creation, administration, or teaching of music exploratory classes. Participants were recruited from the 10 middle schools and the district administrators—principals, and board superintendents. While this study could conceivably be expanded to look at full music programs or the full range of exploratory options within the schools, I examined only music exploratory options.

While the exploratory program concept originated in the United States, this study focused on Canadian schools, in a district that is relatively new to the exploratory model.

This research did not involve student input into the exploratory model. While this data would have been valuable, it was beyond the scope of the current study, but could be considered for future research projects.

Limitations

The grade levels selected for this project are at the middle school level, as exploratory classes in this district are only offered for Grades 6 through 8 students. This study did not take into consideration gender differences across the teaching spectrum due to the small number of participants.

Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, an assumption was made that all middle school students in the district take part in the exploratory classes, and that students arriving in Grade 6 have had prior music instruction through their elementary training. In addition, it was assumed that the teachers of music exploratory classes are music specialists, who are trained in the performance areas of band, strings, or choir.

Assumptions have also been made that music exploratories can be valuable and relevant to students, that all students should have the opportunity to experience music learning during middle school, and that music teachers should try to find a way to connect musically with a wider audience of students.

Definitions

For the purposes of this review, *exploratory* classes refer to 6 to 10 week curricular programs in classes such as music, art, drama, technology, or home economics (Anfara and Brown, 2000; Garvin, 1994). Exploratories tend to be

offered by grade level, and are offered to students from Grades 6 through 8 in School District #61.

This project used Bartel's (2004) *general music* definition, which reads as follows: "music classes in middle and high schools for students not in orchestra, band, or choir; music classes for the differently-motivated students; music classes for students who may lack interest in the kind of music performed by the traditional performing ensembles" (p. 3).

Summary

Given that exploratory classes are a mandatory and integral component of middle schools in School District #61, it is important to understand their purpose. As a teacher new to the middle school model and to exploratory classes, it is important for me to understand the challenges and benefits involved. My own successes and challenges with exploratory classes have been made primarily through trial and error. With no set curriculum or government prescribed learning outcomes for exploratory classes to draw from, the teachers and administrators currently working with this model become the experts. Through a series of interviews with these experts, this study allowed for a closer look at what was the original intent of these courses and what the current reality in this district has become. The following chapter will present a review of literature pertinent to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

Review Of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to explore educators' perceptions of music exploratory classes in School District #61. To provide for a wide view, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a varied group of teachers, as well as district administrators. These individuals discussed their perceptions of the intent, current reality, benefits, and challenges of exploratory courses, with a specific focus on music exploratory courses. This chapter will present a review of literature pertinent to the study.

The chapter is divided into the following sections:

1. Historical Perspective: Why Middle Schools?
2. Emerging Middle School Issue: Lack of Specialized Teacher Training
3. Music in Middle Schools: Appropriate Curriculum?
4. Exploratory Courses at the Middle School Level: Possibilities
5. Challenges with Exploratory Classes
6. Assessment in Exploratory Classes

Historical Perspective: Why Middle Schools?

The middle school model first appeared in the United States in the 1920's, in Canada in the 1960's, and has recently been introduced in British Columbia. The Victoria School District #61 has completed the transition to the Middle School model, and Sooke School District #62 is currently undertaking this process.

Kelly (2001) describes the impetus for change: “In British Columbia, the Sullivan Commission (1988) on Education reported that junior high schools patterned themselves inappropriately after high schools and. . . did not meet the developmental needs of young people between the ages of 10 to 15” (p. 1). Shortly after this commission, school districts began to review literature and begin the process to move towards a middle school model, as the academic and curricular structure of high schools was not considered to be conducive to the specific needs of students in Grades 6 through 8 (Kelly, 2001). This issue has also been a concern in the United States during their transition to the middle school model, as noted by Stauffer (1994):

When the middle school concept and philosophy emerged during the 1960s, one of the goals was to provide curriculum and experiences based on the needs and interests of early adolescent students. Instead of forcing middle-grade learners to conform to high-school-like academic curricular structure, the intent was to provide greater depth and breadth of understanding through study that included exploratory, experimental and creative opportunities.

(p. 32)

Emerging Issue: Lack of Specialized Teacher Training

Kelly (2001) offers a short discussion on the transition in BC, and reviews literature reflecting the issues surrounding the change from junior high schools to middle schools. He observes that staffing and staff training requirements are quite different for this age group. Kelly then describes some of the many

challenges of the transition to middle schools, including curriculum, staffing, facilities, evaluation, climate and culture, and motivation.

A large concern among current music teachers is that they have received very little training or preparation to teach exploratory classes. Kelly (2001) approaches his research from the viewpoint of the teachers at one particular school, who were undertaking this change. Kelly proposes: "Little consideration has been given to provide opportunities to train and help teachers prepare for this type of change" (p. 2). He then recommends that teachers be involved and be driving forces behind this transition. Providing a somewhat contrary view, Gerber (1994) concedes the lack of training for teachers, but notes that "although few faculty have been prepared specifically to teach young adolescents at these particular grade levels, teachers in average middle schools usually do their jobs very professionally, reaching most of the kids most of the time" (p. 6).

Kelly (2001) notes: "In general, teachers are the change agents who are responsible for the implementation of new programs, thus professional development opportunities should be focused on these individuals" (p. 12). Kelly's research found that "eighty-eight percent of the teachers indicated a need for more staff development to assist in the implementation of the middle school philosophy" (p. 48).

Music teachers working with this new middle school model and philosophy also face the challenge of creating and teaching a brand-new exploratory curriculum.

Music in Middle Schools: Appropriate Curriculum?

Research on exploratory courses in the middle school system is sparse, with the primary focus of this research being curriculum based. Anfara and Brown (2000), citing Bergman (1992), note: "Research on exploratory programs has typically focused on what programs are offered, how frequently they are offered, and the trends in how the exploratory program is incorporated into the school day and schedule – design and implementation issues" (p. 58). Decisions on what courses and topics will be offered within the exploratory model vary from school to school (Brazee, 2000; MENC, 1994).

Music programs have developed performance ensembles for students to participate in a group environment, gaining knowledge and skills on a particular instrument or style of music. Kimpton (1994) observes: "Most music programs are parts of a large 'pyramid' of skills and experiences, instrumental or vocal, leading to the top of the pyramid, which is the performance-based program in the high school" (p. 152). However, performance ensembles do not appeal to all middle school students. The limited entry points, intimidating programs to those with limited musical experience, and performance requirements can be factors in avoiding performance ensembles (Bartel, 2004). There are numerous studies advocating that music education should reach a wider audience (Fowler, 1995; Hinckley, 1994; Stauffer, 1994; Reimer, 2003; Webster, 1995) and that music teachers need to take the initiative and try to reach students not interested in traditional band, orchestra, or choral ensembles.

In many cultures, music is simply a way of life, invading every aspect of day-to-day activities (Blacking, 1973). Fowler (1995) asserts: “We have neglected to make clear and explicit the connections between music and life that make art personally significant and meaningful” (p. 24). Fowler goes on to propose that music be put into context, as opposed to being taught as a skill and technique unrelated to “its relationship to people, to purpose, and to meaning” (p. 28). Fowler calls for a reconnection between music and humanity, and describes the benefits of music as a link to our history, a connection with our emotion and sense of being, and as a form of human communication (p. 28). The middle school music exploratory teacher has the challenge of deciding how to approach these issues. Should the class focus on a specific skill-set? Should this short-term course be used to explore music in society and the interconnections found between music and emotion? Should this class be used for social justice, historical research, or as an extension to a performance based program designed perhaps to recruit further students?

Fowler proposes that: “it is often our own teachers who have consigned music to the educational sidelines, presenting it as a special program for the talented or as career education for the few” (p. 23). Kimpton (1994) supports this view claiming music is not often offered to all, and as a result has been relegated to a lower level of importance (p. 152). Offering alternative skill opportunities in music exploratory blocks such as guitar, percussion ensembles, or small ensembles can expand the interest in a music program and appeal to a wider range of students. In addition, courses in social justice, musical history, and

emotion in music can be used as a starting point for cross-curricular opportunities (Reimer, 2003). With more students interested and involved in music, the profile of the music program will inevitably be raised, in addition to removing any isolationist impressions.

The shift in middle schools to team planning can result in exploratory teachers being isolated within the school. In some middle schools, teachers meet in teams, based on grades, or grouping of classes, to discuss student and development issues. These teams generally meet without the inclusion of exploratory teachers, and in some instances will meet during exploratory blocks. Garvin (1994) notes: "Exploratory teachers sometimes see themselves as baby-sitters, watching over students to provide teams of core teachers with common planning time" (p. 117). This isolationism can also be a result of differing perceptions as noted by Williamson (1994): "Music staff often feel the unique needs of their curricular area have not been provided for while other staff often feel that the entire schedule has been constructed around the music department" (p. 24). Fowler (1995)'s in-depth look at music education concludes with a suggestion that music teachers may be causing the problem of isolationism, since many tend to separate themselves and their programs from the school, rarely entering the staff room.

Exploratory Courses at the Middle School Level: Possibilities

Exploratory courses offer a unique opportunity for teachers to develop a connection with students that may be difficult in a traditional classroom setting. Hinckley (1994) quotes *An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, which

“describes the young adolescent as being interested in virtually everything, but nothing very much” (p. 19). Shull and Van de Berg (1994) take this one step further, commenting: “The problem most teachers face at this level is how to present music in a way that is acceptable to the child whose primary interests seem to be interacting with peers and listening to current popular music” (p. 13).

The classroom setting for exploratory options tends to allow for a more relaxed environment where students can feel free to create and make mistakes. Garvin (1994) notes that “students work together in cooperative ways in these areas. They are free to move around, ask questions, and make mistakes without embarrassment” (p. 119). This environment can then allow for the development of a positive relationship between the teacher and student, and more importantly, it allows students that may not feel success in a traditional academic class to excel (Garvin, 1994; Hinckley, 1994).

Middle school students are encouraged to explore creative activities and to have the opportunity to try new skills, techniques, and enjoy new opportunities in a flexible curriculum (MENC Task Force for National Standards in the Arts, 1994; Stauffer, 1994). Supporting this view, Webster (1995) proposes the following five key issues for music education: “project-centered learning with group problem solving, student-centered learning and decision making, critical and creative thinking, time for imagination and reflection, [and] personal record keeping as a way to ‘own’ one’s education” (p. 85-86). These five issues can be addressed with the exploratory model found in middle schools, as opposed to the performance-based programs traditionally found in junior high schools.

It appears that a significant goal of a music exploratory class is to allow students to experiment with musical possibilities. Williamson (1994) notes: “Exploratory programs are designed to assure that every student, regardless of background or experience, has a similar opportunity to experience all the components of a school’s program” (p. 25). Brazee (2000) agrees, stating that the purpose of exploratory courses “is to offer wide-ranging opportunities and experiences that students would not otherwise have” (p. 2). He continues:

An NMSA [National Middle School Association] position paper (1995, pp. 23-24) states that there are three earmarks of an exploratory program. First, an exploratory program enables students to discover their particular abilities, talents, interests, values, and preferences. This self-knowledge helps students to prepare for adult life, not only in terms of vocation, but also as family members and citizens. Second, courses and activities are taught so as to reveal opportunities for making contributions to society. Finally, exploratory experiences acquaint students with enriching, healthy leisure-time pursuits, such as lifetime physical activities, involvement in the arts, and social service. (p. 3)

Brazee (2000) offers further insights into potential benefits of exploratory options, such as the ability to “engage students in ways that core courses often do not” (p. 4-5), the ability to develop new skills, and to access new thinking patterns.

Brazee notes: “Exploration is important for young adolescents because it ensures ‘hands-on’ participatory, meaningful, and engaging experiences. It has endured

because it meets the most fundamental of middle level concepts – it is developmentally responsive and academically challenging” (p. 2).

While there are substantial benefits associated with offering exploratory classes, there are also fundamental challenges stemming primarily from the length of these mini-courses.

Challenges with Exploratory Classes

Exploratory classes are offered in blocks of time throughout the school year. Classes within each grade will generally take one exploratory class ranging from 6 to 10 weeks in a particular subject area, before moving on to the next.

Stauffer (1994) cautions: “Instead of being a subject area of year-round study in which electives are offered, music has become an elective subject” (p. 32). The exploratory classes cannot fulfill all of the musical needs of the child, particularly with one short burst of music every year. She continues: “At their best, exploratory experiences are windows of opportunity that occur *within the context* of the learning process and that are connected in some way to the subject-matter content” (p. 32). While the exploratory topic may catch the attention of a student, there simply is not enough time to develop the skills and musical understanding required of a middle school child. In the middle school music exploratory model, the music teacher will have exposure to a student for a few weeks, and then may not see that child again for over a year. In any subject, this is a difficult way to develop a child’s understanding of subject content. Without structured, continued exposure to musical skills and technique, the

subject matter cannot be fully retained and developed. The opportunity to incite musical passion and knowledge in such a short time frame is challenging.

Fowler (1995) goes on to expand this challenge, looking at exploratory classes that focus on one topic or area: “When subjects are not taught as value, literature is reduced to grammar, history to a list of dates, science to a compendium of formulas, and music to a series of techniques. The art itself tends to get lost” (p. 24). Myers (1994) cautions that: “Administrators, students, and parents cannot be permitted to think that ‘exploratory’ is descriptive of non-sequential, non-basic subjects in which one merely ‘dabbles’” (p. 64). The challenge here is that music exploratory courses can turn into hobby or sampler courses rather than a serious subject with continued musical skill development. The ability to truly reach a child and offer her an aesthetic experience has to stem from structured, sequential learning. While exploratory classes do allow for some aspects of general music or specific skill development to be addressed; e.g. composition and developing listening skills, the short time-line does not allow for continued musical development.

Assessment in Exploratory Classes

Research on assessment in exploratory classes is rare. Brazee (2000) attempts to explain the challenge with exploratory course assessment:

Some teachers think that grades do not support the exploratory nature of the experience and may inhibit students’ willingness to try out new experiences. Unfortunately, some students and parents subscribe to the idea that without a grade, an exploratory course has little value. Some

middle schools include exploratory courses in grade averages while others do not, because they feel not including exploratory course grades promotes more non-threatening participation in new experiences. (p. 4)

Teachers of music exploratory course offerings with no required assessment also deal with the added behavioural challenge of motivating students to try new experiences. These students are also aware that they are not being graded.

Doane (1994) proposes that middle school teachers incorporate varied assessment strategies that reflect personal growth, by determining the required skills and contents and applying specific criteria to assess this level of growth (p. 136). Teachers are encouraged to research varied sources of assessment, and to ensure that this assessment assists all music students (Doane, 1994; MENC; 1994). The Music Educators National Conference book, *The School Music Program: A New Vision* (1994), reminds teachers that: “Everyone concerned must have a clear vision of what students should learn in music classes and rehearsals and how that learning can be assessed” (p. 3).

Summary

The foregoing review has examined literature relevant to the study. Areas of investigation included the history of middle schools, teacher training, issues and challenges, assessment, and benefits found in offering music exploratory courses.

Historically, middle schools and exploratory courses are relatively new to British Columbia. It was determined that developing a middle school model would

allow for a more successful transition to high school from elementary school, while fulfilling the developmental needs of this age group.

Challenges involved in this transition include the lack of teacher training for exploratory classes, as well as the need to create new curriculum, resources, and assessment tools. Many music teachers had worked with elective courses, and now faced decisions on philosophy and the challenges involved in teaching courses with all students involved. While these exploratory courses allowed for common preparation time for classroom teachers, exploratory teachers themselves were exempted from discussions on specific student challenges, and curriculum planning within the school, resulting in a sense of isolationism. As exploratory courses are only offered in 6-10 week segments during the year, teachers have only a short time to teach skills and to gain student interest. It also means that students may not be exposed again to a subject for over a year, thus preventing any sort of systematic, consistent development.

With no set curriculum or government prescribed learning outcomes to draw from, and very little research available for exploratory assessment, each teacher is responsible for creating assessment tools for use during her course, and for creating assessment and feedback at the end of the course. This challenge is amplified by the fact that exploratory teachers often teach every child in the school, resulting in an extraordinary amount of administration.

These exploratory courses, however, offer unique benefits to both teachers and students. The classroom setting is generally more relaxed than a traditional setting of chairs and desks, and can allow for a more active and

experiential environment. Students have the ability to experiment with topics and skills previously unknown or unavailable to them, and to allow them to experiment with new ideas and skills.

The following chapter will explain and discuss the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

As stated previously, the purpose of this project was to explore educators' perceptions of music exploratory classes in School District #61. In this chapter, I will describe and discuss the methodology used for the study. The chapter is divided into the following sections: research design, focus of the research, procedures, analysis, reporting the study, verification, and summary.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative multiple case study (Stake, 2006) design for an inquiry into music exploratory courses in School District #61. Multiple case-study allows for study at both the individual case study level, and at the district-wide level. This project was designed for an inquiry from the perspectives of both teachers and administrators involved with these courses.

Baxter and Jack (2008) describe qualitative case study as “an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources” (p. 1). The phenomenon, or unit of study, in this research was the music exploratory course in School District #61.

The qualitative approach allows for a variety of opinions and perspectives within this phenomenon. Martin (2002) notes that “qualitative inquiry draws substantially on an interpretive tradition with an active role for the researcher, enabling the voices of many participants to be heard, examined, and explained in

ways which develop key themes aimed at generating increased understanding” (p. 65).

This viewpoint allows for a more flexible approach to the research, with the goal of exploring and contrasting the differences of perceptions and application throughout the district. The researcher then has the ability to study the phenomenon within the context of one setting, or compare and contrast across multiple settings (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Baxter and Jack (2008) follow Robert Yin’s (2003) recommendation that case study design be used when:

(a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. (p. 2)

The intent of this research was not to change or manipulate the subjects involved, but rather to gather data in order to understand how, why, and to what extent these courses are utilized.

Within the multiple case study framework, semi-structured interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 2005) was employed, beginning with a set of foundation questions that was answered by all participants (see Appendix 1). Following the foundation questions, the interview was open to further discussion. The initial questions focused on the participant’s perception of the purpose of music exploratories to establish an open-ended discussion. The ability to move away

from these structured questions was crucial to learn more about the context in which these courses are offered, and to allow for the subjective opinions, stories, and perceptions of the participants.

Focus of the Researcher

As a current middle school teacher, I wished to understand how other teachers were approaching music exploratory courses, both from a practical and philosophical standpoint.

To do this, I hoped to determine the original intent of these courses, what current teachers and administrators believe to be the original intent, and if existing courses are meeting this intent.

From a practical standpoint, I wished to see what successes and challenges other teachers have had in offering their courses. Suggestions and ideas on curriculum design, assessment, classroom management, and topics being offered would have been helpful when I started teaching these classes, and will be helpful as I continue to develop and refine my own course offerings.

I have my own experiences to draw on with regard to the challenges and benefits inherent in these courses, but wished to see what was happening on a district-wide scale. A qualitative study allowed me to explore the music exploratory phenomenon at both a personal, individual level, and an objective district-wide level. Denzin (1994) describes this process: "...qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret these things in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 16).

Denzin (1994) goes on to describe the writer as “a bricoleur, a person who fashions meaning out of experience, using whatever aesthetic and instrumental tools are available” (p. 15). Although the scope of this research did not allow for observations of teachers actively working with music exploratory classes, the process of semi-structured interviews with teachers and administrators, combined with self-reflection of my own observations and experiences allowed for an in-depth look at the subject matter.

Procedures

An Application for Ethics Approval for Human Participant Research from the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria was submitted prior to commencing research. Certificate of Approval #11-236 was granted in June 2, 2011.

Subsequently, permission was requested from School District #61 to conduct the research. Ethics approval and project information were submitted to principals of all schools involved in this study, who then signed their approval on a Principal Form for Research. Once these forms were complete, a Request to Use Public School Students or Staff in Research was submitted to School District #61. Approval was received on June 21, 2011 to commence research at six middle schools. On July 5, 2011, approval was received to commence research at the seventh middle school.

A cross section of new and experienced teachers and administrators from School District #61 was necessary to explore the evolution of music exploratories from their inception to their current use in the schools. Middle school music

exploratory teachers, and administrators of middle schools offering music exploratory classes were invited to participate by email. In addition, select administrators and teachers involved in the original middle school exploratory model planning were invited to participate by email. All participant names and email addresses came from the School District email system and phone lists. In addition to being contacted via email, potential participants were sent a formal invitation letter (see Appendix 2).

Six middle school music teachers, and five administrators agreed to participate in this research. The resulting interviews occurred with six music teachers and three administrators.

Data Collection

As noted above, a format of semi-structured interviews with each participant (Bernard, 1988) was used to gather information in order to answer the research questions. The interviews occurred either at the participant's school or at a location acceptable to the participant. All participants were given a Human Ethics Consent Form (see Appendix 3) describing the research, their level of participation, and the confidentiality limits of the study.

Each interview lasted approximately one half-hour to an hour. The researcher clarified the participant's responses throughout the interview with follow-up questions.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher used Dragon Dictate 2.0 for Mac, by Nuance, and GarageBand '09, by Apple Inc., to assist with the transcription process. The initial interviews were

recorded into GarageBand '09. Subsequently the GarageBand recordings were played back by the researcher, who dictated the interviews into Dragon Dictate 2.0, which created the text version of the interviews.

The completed transcripts were then provided to participants for clarification of interpretation and intent. Participants were contacted by telephone for further clarification when necessary. Once final approval was received from each participant, data analysis began.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed the methods of Stake (2006) for data analysis, examining the individual interviews to lead to an understanding of the whole phenomenon, the music exploratory course.

The semi-structured interviews were analyzed initially for common themes and trends (see Table 1). Stake (2006) describes the challenge of trying “to display the unique vitality of each case, noting its particular situation and how the context influences the experience of the program or phenomenon” (p. 39). The research questions formed the initial themes for study, with the addition of common themes that arose during the interviews.

Table 1: Themes of the multi-case study

Theme 1: Original Intent & Teacher Intent
Theme 2: Current Reality: Subject Matter Selection
Theme 3: Current Reality: Assessment
Theme 4: Current Reality: Scheduling
Theme 5: Challenges of Music Exploratory Courses
Theme 6: Benefits of Music Exploratory Courses

The interview recordings and transcripts were analyzed for relevant factors such as common themes, situational issues, individual participant perceptions and stories. This analysis allowed the researcher to then create a cross-case study. Stake (2006) describes this process: “The main activity of cross-case analysis is reading the case reports and applying their findings of situated experience to the research questions of the Quintain” (p. 47), the Quintain in this situation being the phenomenon being researched. From this data, individual and multi-case assertions were developed and analyzed for the final report.

Reporting the Study

The final report reflects both the participant viewpoints and the district-wide results. Reflections of the researcher, an insider to this culture, adds a reflexive component.

To protect their confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants and their schools. In addition, participating administrators were combined into one group for the initial case study descriptions.

Verification: Trustworthiness

Data source triangulation (Yin, 1994) was used to verify the reliability of the research analysis. Data source triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources. Baxter and Jack (2008) report that, “a hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003)” (p. 554).

The use of multiple data sources ensured validity of the data through comparison and contrast. Yin (2003) suggests that a multiple case study “(a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (p. 47). The multiple data sources for this study consisted of the interviews with six teachers and three administrators.

Due to the limited scope of this study, generalizations were not possible as this research focused on a specific phenomenon in one school district.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in the study. Multiple case study was used to investigate the intent and status of middle school music exploratory programs in School District #61.

Six teachers and three administrators participated in semi-structured interviews, discussing their experiences, beliefs, and thoughts on the music exploratory model currently in use. Verbatim transcripts were utilized to ensure participants had the opportunity to clarify and expand on their interview data.

Data analysis of the research resulted in the creation of case studies and merged findings across the school district.

The following two chapters will present the case study reports. Chapter 4 will present the context of the study, School District #61, and the three administrator case studies. Chapter 5 will present the six teacher case studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Cases: Administration

Introduction

This chapter presents the case study of the administrator participants involved in the study. Due to the limited number of administrators in the district, their findings will be compiled into one case study to protect their anonymity. The chapter will begin with a description of School District #61, the context of the study, followed by a presentation of the administrator case. In the following chapter, the six teacher cases will be presented. All names of schools, teachers, and administrators are pseudonyms.

School District #61 and Administration

“I wanted to make sure that every student participates in music at some level during their middle school years.” (Kyle)

Greater Victoria School District No. 61 is located in Victoria, British Columbia and encompasses approximately 18,650 students from six municipalities. There are 28 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, and 7 secondary schools in the district, clustered into school family groupings headed by each secondary school. Although families are initially enrolled in the closest school in their geographical catchment area, parents have the opportunity to request transfers to different schools.

The Superintendent of Schools in this district is extremely supportive of music programs, and is frequently found at concerts, assemblies, and

performances, along with senior administrators and school board trustees. The Superintendent estimates that he attends approximately 40 music and musical theatre performances a year. As a result of his support and leadership, music is offered across the district. Liam, a district administrator, explains:

I think there's huge support, and our district's really well known as a district that supports music. And that's from our Superintendent on down. It's a value that music will happen for all kids that want it. It's available, it's part of our schools.

At the middle school level, all schools offer elective band and strings classes and many offer courses such as jazz band and choir. Each middle school offers different options in performance and exploratory classes, as well as operating its own separate timetable. Some schools offer performance courses outside of the regular timetable, some run their programs within the timetable, and others include a mix of both.

The shift from K-7 schools to the middle school model has allowed for a larger middle school population, which in turn has created the opportunity to offer exploratory classes. Liam explains:

That's one of the advantages of middle school, the economy of scale. You can bring in experts like you had in high school, because you have enough students of that age group, and the school's big enough that you can actually bring in a music specialist, an art specialist, a wood shop specialist, a home [economic] specialist, drama, that sort of thing. The idea is that rather than you electing to take it like in high school, you

explore all of them. So, you don't necessarily have a choice; rather, at middle school, you get experience in all these areas.

Exploratory courses are offered at all middle schools, but it is up to the principal to decide what courses to offer within the exploratory model. The number of exploratory classes offered is dependent upon the number of students enrolled in the school and on how classes are structured. In the 2010-2011 school year, 7 of the 10 middle schools chose to offer music exploratories, and 6 of the 7 music teachers were participants in this research project.

Three administrators were involved in the project, including participants from the principal and senior administration levels. One of these administrators was involved in the initial research into the middle school model and was integral in leading the district reconfiguration. These three administrators participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher, discussing their experiences and thoughts about music exploratories in the district.

The following case study stems from semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1) on the original intent, current reality, challenges, and benefits of music exploratories.

Administrator Case Study

Original Intent

All three administrators agreed that the overall intent of exploratories is for students to have the opportunity to explore a topic or skill. “The goal that was articulated, and still is there—looking at the characteristics of the age group—we

wanted students to have an opportunity to explore different things, whatever it might be, and see if they had an interest for it” (Tia). She continues,

Let them explore different things and they may have a passion for three weeks, and then it might be gone, but they might find a passion forever and it might stay. So it was a way for students to explore their own interests, skills, and passions.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

The selection of specific subjects to be taught is primarily left up to the principal to decide. These courses are not meant to be used to teach core subjects, and generally on-site facilities such as a woodshop or home economics lab are used. Tia was instrumental in creating a one-page puzzle piece (see Appendix 4) for principals to use when deciding what courses to offer.

Kyle proposes a diversity in offerings, suggesting, “the more you offer, the better off you are.” Home economics and woodwork are generally offered to ensure that the facilities in the schools are in use on a regular basis.

What does matter to administration is that the person teaching the class has a passion for the subject, and some knowledge and skill in that area. Kyle explains:

I've seen ukuleles take off in this district. Not because I think they're the hip instrument, but there are adults that believe that they are. If you go in there with a ukulele believing that it's a hip instrument, you'll get kids who will get involved in playing music. There is something to playing music that then transfers to other music. And that's what we're hoping for.

Within the specific subject, the topic to be taught is usually left up to the individual teacher. All three administrators agree that the connection needs to be between the teacher and student, and that if a teacher is excited about sharing her knowledge with the students, they, in turn, will respond positively to this passion.

The best teacher in the world isn't great at teaching everything. It's impossible. You can't. Teachers are specialists. You can't be great at everything. But the idea is to match the subject with the kid, with the teacher, and then you've got something. (Kyle)

As teachers determine their course content and delivery, all three administrators note that the more effective teachers take not only their passion, but also their students' interests into consideration. Liam notes: "The best teachers actually figure out what the kids want to bring to it."

Current Reality: Subject Matter – Music

Liam, Tia, and Kyle all agree that they wish students to be exposed to music at the middle school level. Exploratories offer an opportunity for all students to participate in music. Liam expands on this:

The importance of music, in and of itself, is intrinsically valuable as far as I'm concerned, and there's tons of research on that, in terms of concentration. My own kids are in piano lessons and do music classes and other things. I watch the concentration and the links to math, the links to cultural music, music that comes on the radio, the appreciation of it because they're doing a Grade 1 piano version of Dvorak's "Largo." It's a

very simple version but they recognize the notes being played now by a full symphony and they have an appreciation for it. So I think there's an intrinsic value to music.

As for the content within the music exploratory course, all three administrators agree that the teacher's strengths and passion should guide this process. When asked for their preferences and suggestions in this area, both Tia and Liam expressed their enjoyment of exploratories integrated with other curricular areas such as social studies, art, and woodshop. All three administrators expressed a wish for these courses to stay non-prescriptive, allowing for some freedom and creativity in course offerings.

Currently, students have the opportunity to elect to participate in musical offerings such as band, strings, and choir. The options available depend on the individual school. However, these elective programs do not appeal to all students.

One of the challenges students face with elective programs involves rehearsals placed against core subjects, which results in students having to catch up on missed classes. Additional deterrents can include early morning sessions, conflicts with sports practices, not connecting with the style of music being played, and facing old stereotypes about school musicians.

Current Reality: Scheduling

For the 2010-2011 school year, School District #61 changed to a common overall schedule for elementary and middle schools, ensuring that these schools open and close at the same time each day. Middle schools then chose between

two timetables to run throughout the day, one with 42-minute blocks, and one with 57-minute blocks.

Each school has its own exploratory schedule. Depending on the number of students enrolled and how the classrooms are set up, a school may have exploratories split into three separate grades, or it may have split grades within the classes. The structure may change from year to year as the enrolment changes, or as the administration changes.

From a scheduling viewpoint, exploratory courses act as preparation time for advisory teachers. This gives teachers the opportunity to use this shared time for team meetings to discuss student issues, curriculum planning, and to plan upcoming team events.

Current Reality: Assessment

The administrators have varying viewpoints on assessment. All three agree that feedback for parents is extremely important. The manner and format of that feedback is currently left up to the individual teacher, and for the most part, the administrators are comfortable with this.

The BC Ministry of Education has not recognized the middle school model with regards to Prescribed Learning Outcomes. These curricular guidelines are currently set up as K-7, and 8-12, with variations at the secondary level based on specific courses. Liam notes:

You know, the BC curriculum is being looked at by places all over the world, whether it's music or language arts, because it's a very progressive curriculum. It's a lot about higher thinking skills, process skills. The actual

content is fairly secondary and every time we write the curriculum, it seems more progressive. There is some content. We want kids to be culturally literate, geographically literate, but we don't want them memorizing everything because it's just forgotten anyways. The actual degree of discrete knowledge is far less in the curriculum than the process skills and I think that applies to music. I think you'll find movement and rhythm and tone and pitch and all those sort of areas. It doesn't really say: teach pop music culture vs. classics.

Two of the administrators feel fairly strongly that the lack of set curriculum for exploratory courses is actually a benefit, allowing for freedom and flexibility within the schools, and within the subjects themselves. Liam adds that many teachers already incorporate these learning outcomes into their curriculum. Kyle notes that exploratories “were never meant to be a scope and sequence,” meaning that developmentally, one exploratory course would naturally lead to the next.

Teachers can choose topics of interest to them, and assess according to the subject matter and style of class. The assessment tools are left up to the individual teachers to create and apply, many incorporating self-evaluations. Tia explains:

When we started with exploratory, we had a committee that looked at that exact thing. We had lots of different examples of rubrics and checklists, because exploratories aren't necessarily on the report card. It's got to be meaningful, practical, and fairly easy to do, because exploratory teachers

have a lot of kids that they see. So, there have been some really great examples of reporting, and they do have to report. Most of the ones that I've seen are a rubric or a checklist.

When asked about letter grades, all three administrators agreed that it is the feedback, and not the grade that matters. Liam expands on this:

I do think it's incumbent on the teachers to report to the parents. I get that some teachers feel kids will take it more seriously if it's graded, but I think it's a minor and weak lever. I'm not saying it's irrelevant. I'm hoping if I'm teaching well, kids are learning because they're engaged with learning. They're not learning based on the grades. And I think if I'm doing a good job, that's the case. But I live in the real world and I know that for some kids it's maybe the grade that's the last carrot to push them the extra mile. They don't want to fail. So it's the opposite of the carrot, the stick if you will. But I feel that if that's what we're reducing education to we're missing the whole point. It's about learning. So I don't want to see us go to grades for exploratory, but at the same time I don't want to see teachers have kids fill in an evaluation form and it goes into the report card with no feedback from teachers. It's a course. It's taught, and it's part of the teacher's job to give some feedback to the parents.

Kyle goes one step further, commenting:

I would be devastated if you weren't the most generous marker in the exploratories. Because success breeds success. I want the kids

to feel good about themselves. I want them to understand that they can do music, not that they can't.

He continues: "I was always an easy marker since I never wanted to discourage someone to continue because you never know when that breakthrough cuts in."

Exploratory teachers have the possibility of teaching every child in a school. While this is a unique opportunity to connect with students, it also poses a challenge during report card time due to the sheer number of report cards these teachers complete. Tia notes, however, that it is a different style of class with a different style of assessment:

Well, I look at the kind of report cards that most do. Compared to doing a regular report card, there's no comparison. So, most of the exploratory report cards are fairly straightforward to do, and you've got the kids for - it varies from school to school - let's say 12 weeks. And over the 12 weeks, you can see where those kids are at. Some of the numbers [of report cards completed], of course, are higher than a regular classroom teacher would have, but if I am teaching a Grade 8 classroom and I'm doing all of the humanities for two classes, I've got a ton of marking to do. It's a trade-off. Music exploratory doesn't have any of that. The band teacher, now, is a bit different. The band teacher has a lot of band practices, and concerts, and getting ready for concerts, that's different. But if you're just looking at exploratory, I think it could balance itself out.

Current Reality: Feedback

The administrators have not received a lot of feedback about exploratories. What they have received has been positive. Tia expands on this: “I've never really had anyone phone me, because I would get the complaint if there was one. It would come to me, anything to do with exploratory. I'm not just saying that. I really haven't had a complaint.”

Challenges

From an administration standpoint, the main challenge is staffing. Due to their very nature, exploratory classes are not full-time jobs, but are fairly specialist-oriented. Tia notes:

Usually, the people that are in those positions are qualified for their positions. So, music teachers have a music background. Tech Ed teachers have to have a Tech Ed background. Home Ec teachers have to have a Home Ec background. Now there's other exploratories like drama, and most teachers of those courses have a drama background. Most of them have come in a really qualified manner. I think that's the biggest challenge—getting really qualified people who are interested and don't always want to work full-time.

Additional challenges noted by the administrators include the funding needed to purchase and maintain exploratory equipment, exploratory teachers having to travel between schools, and the challenge of teaching to students who may not be interested in the subject material.

Benefits

Exploratory classes offer the chance for students to gain a connection with the school, and a chance to find something they can be good at. Kyle sums up:

I believe in hooks...I think that that successful band students are successful math students, are successful social studies students. We talk about the link between math and music. I talk about the link between being successful in something, regardless of what it is, and being successful in school. They have to have that one thing that they can do. They need that connection. It's the reason why they wanted come there, they know that they're good at it, they feel good about it inside. And music, you don't have to be 6 foot four, left-handed, and unbelievably coordinated, and the fastest person. And money has never really inhibited it.

For Kyle, exploratories also offer an opportunity to break down gender-based stereotypes:

I think if you walk into that woodworking class, you'll see more females now than you did before. Because in Grade 6, they're not so worried about being seen at it, but in Grade 8 . . . they are cognizant of boys. They are cognizant of some development. They are physically different. They are mentally different.

There were areas of the school young girls did not go into. And if you did, you're there because you're butch, or you were this, or you were that. You took grief. A girl that wanted to take metal work and woodworking, it was

just ridiculous, and they knew that. And you had to push them. Why can't a boy choose cooking? But if you take that choice away from them and you make them take it at a young age, maybe they'll find out that it's okay to stay in cooking and sewing. We have no trouble with fashion designers being male. We have no trouble with our great chefs being male. We tend to have a problem with a 13-year-old boy in his first year of high school when we were K-7, 8-12, who chose to take 100 hours of cooking and 100 hours of sewing. And kids can be cruel. We had to break down those walls.

The reconfiguration to the middle school model offers an opportunity to expose girls and boys to courses such as home economics and woodshop in a safe environment. The option of choice is simply removed. The entire class will take woodshop. Then the entire class will take home economics, or computers, or music, or drama.

From an administration standpoint, exploratory courses can assist with attendance issues, particularly with at-risk children. Liam explains:

Often for those at risk kids, their favourite thing at school is exploratories. We were starting to lose them by Grades 6 and 7 in the elementary model, whereas they get hooked in Grade 6, 7, and 8 because of exploratories. That sometimes is the biggest hook. I mean our woodshop teacher, every lunch, he's great that way. . . . every lunch his classroom is full. There's 30 kids doing woodwork, just because they want to do it. I think for some of

those kids, it's the highlight of the day. Even though wood shop was first term, they are doing more.

This benefit also translates to the teachers, who have the unique opportunity to get to know all, or most, of the students in the school. These connections can assist in keeping children in school.

There are many aspects of exploratory courses that can appeal to children who struggle with behaviour or learning challenges in a core-academic subject. A traditional classroom structure has chairs and desks in rows, or squares, or some sort of formation. For many activities, students are expected to sit still, work on the task at hand, and pay attention to the topic at hand. Liam explains:

There's still so much progressive stuff in education, but it is still overlaid on top of the old factory model because it's very hard to break that structure. Everything is structured around that, from how we hire and how we structure the system. But there are ways to be creative and progressive within that older structure.

This opportunity also applies to full classes of students. Teachers may find that classes labeled by advisory teachers as 'difficult,' can buy into to the altered learning environment and subject matter of exploratory classes, and become a positive class.

Exploratories give students the chance to try different skills and interests before having to choose courses to take in secondary school. Kyle explains:

The idea was to expose students to as many disciplines as possible without having to make that commitment. Without having to say 'for the

next hundred hours, I'm in woodwork.' Just to give them a taste and a feel. So when they go into Grade 9, they go in with some knowledge behind them of what woodwork is like, what metal work is like, what power mechanics is like, what cooking is like. . . they're getting a taste of everything, so when they walk into Grade 9 they can start to focus. They have a set of beliefs of what's important to them. They're starting to become more goal oriented.

All three administrators expressed their viewpoints about music being important to the development of the child, particularly at the middle school level.

Liam expands on this:

The music program is an example of what effective schooling is about. It's about kids working together, and the sum is greater than the parts. When you practice a trumpet, unless you're really skilled on a trumpet, which you are usually not when you're 11–14 years old, it doesn't sound good. But when you put it together in a band, man it sounds great. When I hear those concerts, they're my favourite nights of the year. It's a night where I'm just there to enjoy. What I see isn't so much about the music, it's about the kids, realizing they are a part of something. Their commitment affects everyone else. They are part of a big group that has a common goal, that everyone has an individual role within that goal, and you're not all clones of each other and doing the same thing. You know, you're not all marching in formation identically. You're actually each doing something different, but it always comes together into something that's—the sum of the whole is

greater than the parts. And I think that's a huge life-lesson, whether they continue with music or not, they'll take something away from that.

Tia and Liam both note that music exploratory courses can add a richness to the overall music program, allowing all of the students in a school to find an area of musical interest and to simply enjoy music. Tia adds, "Everyone should have a musical background."

Exploratories offer an opportunity for students to get up, move around, and enjoy experiential, 'hands-on' activities. The opportunity for group work, collaboration, and individual creativity can be explored.

Summary

This chapter has provided the results of semi-structured interviews with three administrators in School District #61 on music exploratory classes. The following chapter will summarize the perceptions of six music exploratory teachers in the district.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Cases: Teachers

Introduction

Six middle school music exploratory teachers participated in semi-structured interviews for their thoughts and perceptions of music exploratory courses in this district. These case studies will be organized in the following manner: original intent, current realities in subject matter, scheduling, assessment, and will conclude with the challenges and benefits associated with music exploratory classes.

Brooke

Ukulele has become big in this community, especially in Victoria. Not just with Island Ukuleles, as Larsen Music is also offering huge classes, so maybe when these kids get out and they need something to do, they'll come and join that group and become part of a different community.

Brooke has been a music educator for 15 years and has taught music exploratory courses for the past five years. Brooke teaches band, strings, choir, and music exploratory class at Hemlock Middle School with a population ranging from 390-410 students.

Original Intent

Brooke believes the original intent of music exploratories was to offer music to all students, and to get them involved. Her own desire is that students

are able to walk away with some enjoyment, and to realize that music is accessible. To some extent, Brooke feels that she is achieving the original intent.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

Hemlock offers exploratories in music, woodwork, home economics, art, dance/drama, and a new trial session this year for Grade 8 on money matters. In music, Brooke has been experimenting with the subject matter.

When she first began teaching music exploratories, she offered a cross-curricular program for the Grade 7 and 8 students using slit-drums that students made in woodshop. With these students, she initially used the resources created by a local teacher, who created a series of lesson plans focusing on world music. Students make individual string instruments, and then use them for several activities. Brooke supplemented these lessons with ukulele. The Grade 6 students explored instruments, learning and experimenting with woodwind, brass, percussion, and ukuleles. Brooke has also experimented with courses such as musical theatre in the past.

Recently, Brooke transitioned all three grades to a common curriculum focusing on experimentation and performing on ukulele. The Grade 6 students also experiment with a variety of instruments. Students receive a refresher lesson or two on the ukulele in Grades 7 and 8 and then move to a standard daily format. Brooke elaborates:

I give them the song we're studying for the day. All the chords and the diagram of the fingerings are on the side, and then the song is written out

with the chords on top. We just strum through it, and I plunk away on the piano.

Brooke has found a way for students to find relevance in their exploratories through the use of technology. She uses YouTube [on-line video player] as a tool for music listening and as a way to introduce a world instrument every day. Students are also given the opportunity to use their Internet accessible cell-phones to learn a song on the ukulele once they have learned a few chords. She explains:

What was really exciting—we have a no cell phone policy in our school—is that in my class that has gone out the window because the kids needed to figure out a song. I sent them out into the hallway and the vice principal [responded], ‘Oh my God. They were so focused. They weren’t using their technology inappropriately. They were actually doing what they’re supposed to.’

Brooke finds that she still incorporates aspects from previous courses, such as the subject material developed by a local teacher on building individual instruments, but notes:

I want to sell my own [course to the students.] Take what works for me, such as building instruments. Her stuff is brilliant. It worked for her, because she developed it. Again, take what we need, give her credit, and then we can supplement it. Making instruments, making ukuleles, there’s that connection.

When asked about how she chooses topics to cover, Brooke commented, “trial and error. Every class is different. So, I kind of test the waters with them in the first week and see what it is I can get away with.” As Brooke continues to refine her courses, she hopes to add more performance-oriented activities, and send them off to create songs in small groups, but feels that her courses are “in a good spot.”

Brooke notes that the topic selection needs to be up to the teacher, adding, “It has to be what you’re comfortable with.”

Current Reality: Scheduling

Hemlock runs on a 42-minute schedule, with exploratories offered over four afternoons. Each grade receives three exploratory blocks per week, two 42-minute blocks, and one 85-minute block. Brooke teaches exploratory classes to Grades 6, 7, and 8. All students in the school receive music exploratory classes. However, due to her full music course load, she only teaches the Grade 6 students once per week. The remaining two classes are allotted to dance/drama with another teacher.

The exploratory courses run from 6 to 10 weeks at Hemlock. For the 2010-2011 school year, Grade 8 students received 6 weeks of exploratory classes, Grade 7 received 7 weeks, and Grade 6 received 10 weeks.

Current Reality: Assessment

Assessment for music exploratory takes the form of a report card insert, and is based primarily on participation. Students do a self-evaluation for the course using a 1-5 rating scale, and an effort mark of Satisfactory, Good, or

Excellent. On the back of the report card, Brooke has a checklist and the same effort grade on the bottom, followed by a generic comment. In the situation of a child showing outstanding effort, she may customize the comment.

Brooke avoids the Unsatisfactory rating, noting, “I generally don’t give anyone an Unsatisfactory. They would have to be a complete lump of nothing to not achieve satisfactory, if they are even trying a teeny bit.”

Due to the large number of students in music, and the time requirements of the music program, “report cards tend to be on the back burner. Sometimes I don’t get to them until its report card season, and there’s just no time to sit down.”

Brooke does not specifically utilize the BC Government Prescribed Learning Outcomes, but does feel that she is covering them.

Challenges

Brooke’s primary concern has to do with the scheduling of her courses, which results in a double-block of exploratory class once per week with each grade. Her experience has led to the decision that this double block is too long for an exploratory course. Additionally, having music exploratory courses after lunch results in students “high on sugar,” and she feels that morning classes would result in better focus.

Brooke would like to see an exploratory team created at her school, similar to the grade teams that exist, to discuss student issues and planning.

Brooke has been conflicted about the value of exploratory courses. She has wavered back and forth over the value of these courses, and feels that this

may be related to the perceived value placed on them by other teachers. With exploratory time being utilized as preparation time by advisory teachers, she has at times felt that her courses are not valued, and as a result has struggled to value them herself.

Additional challenges for Brooke include the sheer number of students taught and assessed, and the lack of planning time to create brand new curricula with all the resources and assessment tools required in these courses.

Brooke has not received training to specifically teach music exploratory courses, but notes that current music students at the University of Victoria are now receiving an introduction to these classes as part of their training. Recently, a student teacher observed Brooke's classes for a day, and was able to walk through the process of running a class with Brooke.

Benefits

One major benefit of teaching music exploratory classes is that she gets to meet all of the students in the school, a unique connection for teachers. This connection has enabled her to reach out to students that would not otherwise know her:

Yesterday, I noticed one of the Grade 7 students had not gone on the campout. She was just sitting in a classroom all by herself, reading, because she was told by her parents to be at school. So I suggested that she spend some time in the music room... I would not have met her unless it was through exploratories. So, she was sorting music, and she was great.

Another benefit of teaching her curriculum is the ability to put on small concerts after a short time:

Now that I'm doing impromptu concerts for the office admin, they just think that's brilliant – taking a class down and performing for them. We just take the music stands, take the piano in, and I just play chords. It was goose-bumpy material to have those kids singing.

Brooke is quite happy that some of her students are continuing with the ukulele, and are starting to apply it to current music and ensembles.

Cory

I think that if you truly value music, you should figure out a way to schedule it so that they get it.

Cory has been a music educator for 5 years and has taught music exploratory for 1 year. He teaches band, choir, vocal jazz, and music exploratory courses at Magnolia Middle School with a population of approximately 470 students.

Original Intent

Cory believes the original intent of music exploratories was to give exposure to music for all students. While many students at Magnolia elect to take band, strings, or choir, music exploratories offer the opportunity for all students to participate in music.

When Cory started teaching the music exploratory program, he approached it from the standpoint of a band teacher, focusing on theory and

notation as the foundation. He has since evolved his program to make it as “fun and experiential as possible.”

His goal for these courses is for students to have an understanding of how to analyze music, a stronger appreciation for music, and a ‘hands-on’ experience.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

Magnolia offers exploratory courses in foods, woodwork, an art/drama combination, and some music. Music has recently been added as an exploratory class where supported with sufficient student enrolment. Not all students at Magnolia receive music exploratory classes.

Grade 6 students explore African and world instruments, with a focus on rhythm. Grade 7 and 8 students learn or review how to play the guitar through the use of rock and roll. Students study chord structure, receive an introduction to the electric bass, and work in small combos.

Cory has introduced some technology into his curriculum, and explains, “We have it set up so that I can use the laptop in the room plugged right into the system. It’s great when we can find recordings of the same chords, because we can play along.” He has also used Internet videos to provide a 12-bar blues ‘backing’ track for students to play along with, and videos to assist with teaching.

Cory plans to use the same curriculum next year for Grades 6 and 7. With the Grade 8 students, he is hoping to try something new, perhaps advanced guitar. He would also like to bring in more history to integrate with the rock and roll music they use. Cory notes that it is vital to tie in popular culture and music into exploratory classes. He will continue to experiment, and notes that, “You just

look at it as an opportunity to try something out. You can take something away if you do it again, or be able to build on it.”

Cory initially struggled with designing the curriculum, and feels that it would be helpful to have some information and materials available to teachers. In his situation, there was no existing curriculum nor were there any resources left from the past teacher. He experimented with a few ideas, and tried to incorporate a blues segment from another teacher. Cory had limited success with this, and notes that the subject matter “has to do with whoever is teaching it. You've got to teach whatever is comfortable for you.”

Cory has not received much feedback other than positive words from his principal, but has determined that the students like the courses.

Current Reality: Scheduling

Exploratories are offered three times a week at Magnolia in 57-minute blocks. Classes rotate through the exploratories at different times in 11-week rotations. Most students receive all four exploratory offerings except for students in the French Immersion stream. These students only receive three exploratories and do not participate in the music exploratory option. The current set-up may change if enrolment drops.

Current Reality: Assessment

Cory proposes that a middle schools exploratory curriculum needs to be created to differentiate it from the K-7 model:

Because if you look at the outcomes, it's intended to be a general music program at an elementary school, where they get music over the course of

the year. But we don't see the kids for the whole year. So how can we expect to have the same development? It was the same in home economics. It was even worse. The PLO's don't even start until grade 8 . . . and then for grade 8, it's like a semester-based course, whereas in middle school, you only get them for a certain amount of time. So, I think, if we had those we could more accurately say what were supposed to cover.

He proposes that the lack of PLOs is a hindrance to middle school teachers. He questions, "How do you defend what you're covering? What standard?" He continues, "To me, in this respect, it's failing. It's not accurately there, although [the administrator] makes an interesting point. As long as it's not there, you don't have anything to account for. So it allows more teacher flexibility."

With his own exploratory courses, Cory emphasizes that they are non-grade classes. Students are assessed using rating scales of 1-4, which are designated as Not Yet Meeting, Minimally Meeting, Fully Meeting, and Exceeding Expectations. He uses this rating scale for all of his assessments throughout the course and for the report cards, to which he also adds some comments. He proposes that it would not be a bad thing to have consistent assessment across the district using this rating scale or something similar.

Challenges

Cory believes that music exploratories should be offered at all schools, particularly schools in a lower socio-economic environment. With regards to

Magnolia, Cory believes that all students should receive these courses. For instance, not all of the Grade 7 students at his school will have the opportunity to try guitar.

Teacher training on these courses would have been helpful, and Cory recommends taking a guitar course as part of teacher preparation.

Cory has found it difficult to have the exploratory classes taken seriously, and believes they are simply considered as teacher preparation time, or babysitting. He has been trying to make his courses something that are valued by both staff and students, and notes, "I think it has as much to do with how the teacher approaches it. If the teacher has an attitude that this is something on some level to take seriously, then the kids are going respond to that."

Classroom management was initially a challenge for Cory. The change in setting from a regular classroom includes the possibility of students getting out of control due to the experiential, hands-on nature of the program. In addition, exploratory teachers contend with reluctant students, which can be new for teachers who usually deal with elective programs. He explains,

For example, with the Grade 6 students we learn how to play various instruments, and then we learn to play in a specific ensemble where each instrument has a part. . . . At the end of the course we do rhythm composition. To be different, I say, "Okay now get into groups and create a one bar repeating pattern. Each instrument has to be different and you need to present it to the class." Well, that gets . . . nuts. And with one

portable and 30 kids in 5-7 groups, it's controlled, but at the same time its nuts. So how do you control that?

The lack of existing curriculum and resources from previous teachers also poses a challenge for teachers, particularly if they only have a few days to create curriculum prior to the start of school.

Benefits

Cory is quite positive about his exploratory experiences, and values his courses. He believes that these classes can promote music advocacy and make an existing music program even better, through everyone's exposure of music for everyone.

Students can gain exposure to different styles of music or time periods, try something new, and make connections to their parents' music. Students can then gain a greater appreciation of music, which will translate into a society where citizens have a greater appreciation of music.

Doug

It's a bit odd actually, because they didn't offer the music exploratory to everyone, which to me, I think, kind of defeats the point of it in some ways. It's supposed to be for everyone.

Doug has been a music educator for 3 and a half years, and has taught music exploratory courses for 2 years. He taught this past year at Dogwood Middle School, and at Spruce Middle School the year previously.

For the 2010-2011 school year, Doug did not teach a Grade 7 exploratory course.

Original Intent

Doug believes that the original intent was to offer music to everybody. He feels it is important that students have the experience of playing an instrument, and believes that his exploratory classes meet the original intent.

Doug's goal is for students to gain an "appreciation of music and musicians and what it takes to be one, the kind of work they put in, what it is to practice something, to get better at it, and to improve and master something."

Current Reality: Subject Matter

Guitar is new to Dogwood School, and may not be offered every year. For this past school year, the same guitar curriculum was offered to both Grades 6 and 8. He recognizes that this could be a challenge for the new teacher next year as students will have mixed experience levels, but for this first year of guitar, it made sense to offer a beginning course to all students who received exploratory classes.

Doug's experience has led him to determine not to teach guitar with Grade 6 students in the future, finding they have less independence to work on their own. They need more guidance and have a harder time with the instrument. When asked what he would consider instead, he proposes the ukulele as a good alternative for this age level.

At Spruce Middle School, Doug taught drama to Grade 6/7 split classes, and guitar to Grade 8 students.

He recommends that teachers choose topics they are comfortable with, observing, “If you don't like the material, it's very hard to teach it.” Doug notes that the subject matter is pretty open, and that the teacher needs to determine his goals:

You have to decide what it is you want to get done. We talked about what the intent is, to try get some music to them. To me that needs to be done by learning an instrument. There's a quote by, I think, Thelonious Monk, who says: “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.” So that's why for me, they need to play the instrument. It needs to be learning some kind of instrument. To me, guitar right now seems like the most accessible, the thing that could have the most success in motivating some kids to get into music, especially if they are the kids that are not in band and are not picking up extra things.

Finding subject matter that appeals to the full range of students is important. Doug focused on traditional notation and chords in his class, believing both to be important to learn. He also incorporated popular music, noting it to be important and relevant for students.

If he had the resources, Doug would love to create a *Rock 101* course for students, and add technology in the form of a Mac lab. He would love to teach song writing and have the students record it in GarageBand, or a similar software program. They could compose a simple four-chord song, add an electronic drumbeat and some sound effects or vocals.

Current Reality: Scheduling

At Dogwood, teams with four classes participate in four exploratories, including music. Those teams with three classes have three exploratories and do not participate in music. Students in the English stream are separated into separate grades, while students in the French stream have some split grade classes.

Exploratories run on a 9-week rotation, and are offered 3 times per week in 57-minute blocks.

Current Reality: Assessment

Doug assesses students from two aspects, a self-evaluation and final playing test. Students are given the opportunity to test at lunch, or during class in front of the other students.

The final report is a two-sided insert in the student's report card. On the front page of this report Doug incorporates a "moderated student self-evaluation" which is a student self-evaluation that has been reviewed and modified by the teacher to reflect both the student and teacher evaluations. A photocopy of the student's playing test results is on the back. Doug then adds comments and an overall effort grade at the bottom, using a rating scale of Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, and Insufficient Effort.

Doug issues the self-evaluation to the students to for completion, and then makes changes as necessary:

If they give themselves a five in focus, and they were never paying attention, I change it. I can do that. And I don't micromanage everything,

but I will change it if there's something where I can tell they're not being honest with themselves. Either way, they could be being too harsh on themselves. Actually, I probably make more changes that way. I'll change it.

When asked about letter grades, Doug notes that the letter grade may not necessarily mean anything more to the student. He would like to develop his assessment to include more projects and evaluations in the middle of the course, rather than just at the end.

Doug has not specifically looked at the Music PLOs to see how they would apply to his courses.

Challenges

The main challenge for Doug is that music exploratory is not offered to everyone, and he believes that this practice means that music exploratories miss their intent. Doug gives the following example:

I might have a kid who's gung-ho on guitar, but because [he] just happens to get put in this one class, [he doesn't] get it. That seems odd. And like I said, I think the point of these is that everyone gets a chance to do these.

Classroom management has been a challenge due to the lack of structure that would be found in a traditional classroom. Doug explains: "By nature it has to be lacking in structure a little bit, and grade 6 and 7 students need structure like crazy."

Another challenge involves classes with a high number of students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), particularly those with low attention spans.

He ran into this situation at Spruce Middle School: “There's one class that had approximately 11 IEPs [students] in it. And they are nice, very nice kids, friendly, but the attention span of a goldfish.” Doug has found that more Education Assistant (EA) support is needed for these classes, adding:

I find that a lot of the times that EA's are in the class they don't feel that they can help out, because it's something that they don't know how to do, because they don't play guitar. So sometimes I find that the EA's will leave.

Occasionally, students are pulled out of exploratory courses for their other classes, making it more difficult for them to catch up with the class. Some students also walk in with a negative attitude, believing that music doesn't matter, and that because the class is not graded, the course doesn't matter. Doug elaborates:

I remember I had this one student in this last Grade 6 rotation. He came in the very first day and said “Guitar is stupid. I don't want to do it.” I get kids like that, but by the end of the rotation, I tried to get them playing a little bit so I can say, “Hey I told you could do it. You can do it.”

Benefits

Doug has received positive feedback on his courses from students, but little feedback from parents or administration. He has found that there are approximately three students every class that really value the course, noting, “They have been turned onto the guitar because of the class. And even if there's only three kids like that in each class, to me that's completely worth it.”

Doug believes that the content and format of music exploratories can really benefit students struggling in other aspects of school:

There was one student I was talking about with one of my administrators the other day. He only started the guitar in September in our exploratory, but just loved it. He was so well behaved in that class, and by the end I gave him a perfect mark on his last playing test because it was perfect. No problems there. And then just a couple days ago, on Friday, he played in the school talent show. He had gotten an electric guitar for Christmas, and he played "Stairway to Heaven." The whole thing – well, he cut out some sections to make it a little bit shorter so it wasn't like 9 minutes long – and he can play all the different chords, and the nice picked beginning, confidently, in front of the whole school, and he's only been playing since September. But apparently...this kid is having some academic issues and they've had to transfer him into a behaviour program. So that's a big deal.

He continues:

And there's another student too, in another class, who is commonly getting suspended every once in a while. He has a lot of challenges and I've subbed in his regular classroom for his teacher. Teaching him was like pulling teeth, but in guitar class he was really good. He sat next to this one guy . . . who has a lot of guitar experience, and they would spend a lot of time playing. He wasn't always learning exactly what I asked him to; he wasn't always playing the song. But he was playing all the time, and he was learning a lot and doing well at it too.

Aside from allowing teaching teams to meet together during exploratory time, Doug believes these courses can offer a societal benefit:

If they have a little bit of an appreciation for what is to be a musician, to learn an instrument and to practice it, and they understand that better, then they're more likely to be the kind of people that would have an appreciation for it, and they're more likely to support it. We have people that vote for government that will support the arts; they'll support the arts in their own way. There's an importance there.

Kate

If we didn't have exploratories at a school, maybe some of these kids would never be exposed to music or never be exposed to building a CD rack, or having these opportunities. Maybe they don't have an uncle that can show them how to build something, or a mom that's home full-time teaching them how to cook meals.

Kate has been a music educator for 10 years, with breaks. She has taught at Spruce Middle School for 3 years and has offered music exploratory courses for these 3 years. Spruce has between 220 and 233 children in Grade 8 classes and split Grade 6/7 classes.

Original Intent

Kate believes that the original intent of music exploratories was to have students explore something new, and to see what would tweak their interest. When asked if her courses meet the original intent, she rates her classes an 8

out of 10. Her student self-evaluations also confirm that the original intent is being met.

Kate has established some goals for music exploratory classes:

I just want them to get a better appreciation for music. . . . Now that they've tried musical theatre and they know what it's all about, when they go to [secondary school], they'll say "Hmmm. Maybe I could take a role in a play now or something. Maybe I'll like that." Maybe they'll go downtown and see a play that they wouldn't normally get tickets for. They don't have to love it and it doesn't have to be their thing, but they can appreciate what goes into it. . . . I'm not a country music fan, but I appreciate the musicality that goes into making that country song. I understand what goes into making heavy metal. You can still appreciate. You can see the value.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

Spruce Middle School offers exploratories in home economics, computer science and technology, woodworking, and fine arts. The requirement at Spruce is that the course be a fine arts offering. Kate then has the freedom to decide what subject matter to offer.

For music exploratory options, Kate offers guitar to the Grade 8 students and musical theatre to the Grade 6/7 classes. For the 2010-2011 school year, Kate experimented by switching these courses, but has since determined that she will flip them back for the next year, finding that the longer rotation for the grade 6/7 classes works better with musical theatre. The guitar course focuses primarily on chords, and incorporates popular music, following her belief that the

music children prefer to listen to needs to be taken into consideration in order to “make it relevant for them. Otherwise, they just tune out.”

When deciding what curriculum to offer, Kate feels that the teacher’s knowledge and passion are the primary considerations. She explains, “What kind of makes me tick, and kind of gets me excited, because I know that I can impart that passion to the kids... and if I can be passionate about it, then they can get passionate about it too.” The next step is to consider the students. She continues, “You just have to do what you think the majority of the class will kind of hook onto, and hope that that will catch on with the other kids and hook them along. Offer a little bit of variety.” The challenge is in finding something that will appeal to all of the students, as there will always be one or two students not interested in the course.

Current Reality: Scheduling

At Spruce, the Grade 8 students participate in all four exploratory offerings, while the split Grade 6/7 classes have three exploratory courses, based on the student enrolment in the school. Exploratories are offered over 10 weeks for the split Grade 6/7 classes, and over 7 and a half weeks for the Grade 8 exploratories.

Current Reality: Assessment

Kate uses a self-evaluation for the music exploratory course, looking at what was learned, what they are proud of, and what they didn’t know. Students give themselves a rating of Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Good, and Excellent.

Once she has reviewed it, Kate adds teacher comments. This self-evaluation is then inserted into each student's report card.

Kate believes that assessment should be left up to the teachers to decide. She does use the PLOs as a guideline, but believes they are not needed in the music exploratory curriculum.

Challenges

Kate would like exploratory teachers to be provided with some time to put curriculum together, noting:

We need to have some prep time to put our courses together because we are creating a full course and curriculum, and we are expected to have outcomes and evaluations. We're supposed to have all of these structured things that we should be doing in our classroom but we don't get time to create them. We just make up a course.

With regards to teacher training, Kate feels that having some options and ideas would have been helpful in creating and implementing this curriculum, and likes the idea of having an opportunity to share ideas with other music exploratory teachers.

Having split grade classes is identified as a challenge for Kate. She also believes that more help is needed in the classroom, finding that the EAs (Education Assistants) often stay for 10 minutes, and then leave.

In the class, Kate notes that extra time is needed to introduce musical etiquette to students with no experience, including how to take care of the instruments in the room, how to behave in a classroom with no desks in a row,

dealing with expensive equipment, and dealing with students not used to being independent. She explains:

I have to do that for the entire first week. Obviously the equipment, rules of the room, and we talk about it pretty much every day. Just general respect of each other in the room, and what happens when you come through those doors. And what happens when you leave.

Kate adds that the sheer number of report cards to be completed is a challenge.

Benefits

The opportunity to participate in exploratory courses, particularly in her school with its socio-economic reality is “super important.” She explains, “A lot of our kids, obviously their socio-economic status is not the best at a lot of times. A lot of families struggle. So these opportunities are really important for them,” adding that this may be their only exposure to these topics.

Kate describes what students can gain from music exploratory:

...appreciation for musicians, and how to act when you go to a concert.

When I'm showing them something on guitar, there's no talking when

there's music happening. It's rude. You don't do that in a concert. A

chance to learn these things about music. All these little things. Clapping

after someone has performed. . . . All these little etiquette things. I think a

better appreciation and understanding of what goes into creating a piece

of music, or creating a play, or singing a note, instead of them thinking

they can just sing, “la, la, la.” There's lots of preparation that goes into

being a good singer. Maintaining good vocal quality. All these little things that they would never think of before.

The societal benefits are a by-product of music exploratory courses, including how to treat each other with respect, co-operation, and teamwork.

Nathalie

I think it's very valuable for students who don't pursue music in other ways; if they've never had a piano lesson, if they've never chosen to sing, if they've never chosen to be in band or anything else that the schools offer, I think it's really valuable that they get some info about music.

Nathalie has been a music educator for 3 years, and a private music teacher for 25 years. She has taught music exploratory for 3 years at Dawn Redwood Middle School, which has a student population of approximately 440 students.

Original Intent

Nathalie believes the original intent of music exploratory courses was to teach students something they didn't know, and to show some relevance to today. While this was met in the K-7 model, she adds, "but then we split off into middle schools; the younger kids are not quite high school age, but they're a little bit old for elementary."

She believes that music is important in school, and that everyone should have music. In a lot of ways, Nathalie believes that her courses are meeting the original intent, and that they encourage students to open their minds.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

Nathalie primarily teaches exploratory classes to Grade 6 and 8, but has observed the Grade 7 exploratory class frequently.

The Grade 6 music exploratory course focuses on the blues. Usually, she incorporates ukulele into her curriculum, except for this past year due to a temporary relocation of the school for renovations. Nathalie incorporates jazz resources and a look at the history of the blues, including what it is and where it comes from. She notes that a lot of the music today comes from the blues, and this helps students relate the music of today with its roots. Students work with a 12-bar blues format, the blues scale and lyrics to write and perform their own tune. Occasionally, this will incorporate ukuleles, vocals, and the bass drum. She explains:

The reason I like to teach the blues is because I like to show kids some relevance for today. I try to teach them something that they don't know, and then bring it up to things that are happening today. A lot of their music, whatever kind of music they listen to, if you research it back it comes from the blues.

Nathalie works hard to ensure the courses are as relevant as possible to the students, and that the courses appeal to many of them, continuing:

Recently I had a boy from a lower socio-economic family, who had never been part of a musical ensemble, ever. In class he chose to be the singer of his song in a blues group. He only took a little prodding and realized he could sing and had a nice voice, and so he did it with a group of like five boys. He was willing to sing in front of the class, and I was so impressed. I kept telling him that what he was doing was good every time, and it was amazing. He did it, you know.

When utilizing the ukulele in her blues class, her goal is to take the instrument and do something else with it, rather than just teach how to play it.

With the Grade 8 class, Nathalie focuses on relevance. She has in the past experimented with a rap exploratory, its history, research, quizzes, and performances. She had success with this course, noting that:

Most of them liked it because they didn't have to sing. They could be musical and they could come up with something. The rap lyrics were really fun to work with. Some of them really got into it, and it was fun to watch.

She has also experimented with a drum course using drumsticks and practice pads, with a focus on rhythm. The grade eight course now incorporates guitar, where she introduces them to a few chords and teaches them a song. Students can pick songs off the Internet, or bring in their own music. Using three or four chords, students then work in small groups to put on performances. Nathalie has had success with a lesson on lyrics, and notes, "I think it makes them think even more . . . how lyrics can affect music and how music affects the lyrics."

Students also have the option of bringing in their own music. Once they have learned about the 12-bar blues and hearing chord changes, they can apply it to their own music.

The Grade 7 music exploratory course is taught by another music teacher, and incorporates aspects of the social studies curriculum on early instruments and civilizations. This course was founded on resources from a retired teacher in the district, and includes a variety of activities. She notes:

I think it's nice to be able to do different things within an exploratory class, so they go to the library, they look at maps, they look at a little bit more social studies type stuff. They can use the computers and then they still get down to doing some 'make this instrument' and that kind of thing.

With these music exploratory courses, Nathalie includes the basic musical needs and PLOs, learning about things such as performance, being a good audience member, and musical history. Both teachers use the computer lab for research and written projects.

She believes that the subject matter depends on the teacher's motivation and expertise, and should incorporate a balance of performance, classroom work, and computer work where possible. Above all, the courses need to be tailored to each individual class.

Nathalie has received positive feedback on her courses. The parents are happy with the content and find it interesting. The kids, for the most part, enjoy the classes, although she notes that there will always be the odd child that does not want to be there.

Current Reality: Scheduling

Exploratory classes at Dawn Redwood are from 6 to 8 weeks in length, and are in pods of 4 or 5. Students receive four blocks of exploratory class each week, in 42- minute blocks, or in double blocks.

Nathalie has found that the double blocks can be difficult. She ensures that she mixes up the activities, and has two things on the go at once. One block will be based in the music room, and will be generally broken into three different segments or activities. For the second block, students will get up and go somewhere else to do something completely different.

Current Reality: Assessment

Students in music exploratory classes are given an effort mark for everything they do, based on a rating of Insufficient Effort, Satisfactory, Good, and Excellent. They are assessed on a variety of items, including how they treat instruments, their test results, the extent to which work is completed, performances, and cooperation, resulting in approximately 8 or 9 marks for the course. Students receive an overall effort and grade for their report card insert.

Students do not receive letter grades for music exploratory courses, although Nathalie believes it would help, explaining, "I do have the odd kid that would be 'well, why should I do this; it doesn't matter anyway' kind of attitude. . . I think it would help because I think to many kids that letter grade means a lot."

Challenges

Classroom management can be a challenge in music exploratory classrooms, particularly when there are four to six groups rehearsing at once.

Nathalie has found exploratories to be the hardest class she teaches, because:

It's classroom teaching and I think definitely coming out of university as a music teacher, I was not prepared for a classroom. Sure, we spoke of behaviour management, but it didn't really show itself in a band room or in a band class. It shows itself in exploratory much, much more.

In addition, many students are not used to the expectations of the room, including the expensive equipment and instruments, and the lack of desks makes it difficult to assign written work.

One of the difficult challenges for Nathalie has been finding time to create the curriculum for exploratory classes, particularly when school starts only a few days after new and relocating teachers are given their jobs.

Benefits

Not all students are interested in the course content. Nathalie has found that by using a variety of tools such as performance or art projects, these students can, however, sometimes be turned around:

Recently, I had a boy that I found very difficult in the classroom. Every day, the same attitude, "I don't want to be here." I finally found out that he was a beat boxer. He didn't tell anybody, but someone told me he did that. So I asked "Can you do this?" and he said "Oh yeah. I go to competitions." [I replied,] "Here's a mic. Show us how you do it." All of a sudden he had

'bought in' because he was showing other kids in his class how he did it.
So we all tried it.

The altered structure from a traditional classroom can prove beneficial for students. Nathalie explains, "Their exploratory time is that time where they're not in their own classrooms, so it's different. It's a break for everybody."

For the teacher, there is a benefit to teaching the course 4 times per year, allowing the teacher to evolve or change the curriculum, or to try something new.

Music exploratory courses are valuable for students who do not pursue music in other ways. Students have the opportunity to explore the band room and instruments. They can learn some skills on the guitar, and realize that it is accessible, and even start up a band if they wish to.

The change in atmosphere of these courses can allow for changes in students. Nathalie explains:

. . . when they come to us, they've already got those classroom things where they've worked out the leaders in the classroom, and it's sometimes interesting to see in the music classroom, different leaders emerge, or different strengths come out. So it doesn't really matter if they were the smart one or they get all the right answers in the classroom. They're not always the kids that get the most done in music.

Nick

Music is a huge part of what we do. I don't need to convince you about the value of music in our society, but I think music will make them better citizens. I don't want to sound like a textbook, or a cheese ball, but I think it's really important.

Nick has been a music educator for 9 years in School District #61 and has taught music exploratory courses for 8 years, following one year of drama exploratory. He currently teaches at Beech Middle School, which has a population of approximately 420 students.

Original Intent

Nick believes the original intent of music exploratories was to provide enrichment for kids, to provide all students in the school with an understanding of the possibilities of music. He feels that his courses meet this original intent.

Nick's short-term goals with music exploratory classes are to provide an enjoyable and safe place where he can deliver his course. Students will have the opportunity for collective music making, have fun, and enjoy the moment.

In the longer term, students may choose to continue on with the ukulele. They also have the chance to connect with a culture and be part of a learning process. Students can also connect with a global context and experiment with co-curricular integration.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

Nick approaches the music exploratory course as a taster, or survey course and tries to connect his content with modern music.

His Grade 6 course focuses on ukulele and music of the Pacific Rim. Of the four exploratory classes in a week, three classes are designed around learning the ukulele, and the final class focuses on world music.

Grade 7 students explore ancient music and music of the Middle East. Nick's content connects with the social studies curriculum, and offers a variety of activities, such as computer music using composition software and learning about Klezmer music, which is Nick's expertise. Students also have the opportunity to create their own string instruments, and he has found that:

It's kind of interesting for them because [as] they build their own instrument, . . . they understand that the great lyre is like 4000 years old, and they were using the same principles of making sound then as they are now, with regard to tension and sound boxes. So they're making self-discoveries of this stuff, which is kind of neat.

The Grade 8 students learn about blues bands under the umbrella of the 12-bar blues. Students are reintroduced to four chords on the ukulele, and learn how they fit into the 12-bar blues. Students participate in singing and playing, and are able to learn about the upright bass, and drums. In order to play the drums, students must first learn the ukulele part, and practice the drum parts on their laps. Students are given extensive opportunities to learn about improvisation, primarily using tetrating-fours [groups of four notes]. This is a goal-oriented class, and students work towards small ensemble performances with soloists. One of the appealing aspects of this class for Grade 8 students is the reality of working together to play in a band; they can connect this with popular culture.

Nick has also integrated this curriculum with the iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad software. Students will work in groups of four and re-create this process using a 12-bar blues application. He has also included popular music to bring additional relevance to students, noting that it helps students to buy in and connect with the course.

Nick has continued his cross-curricular integration, having students build drums in technology education, and playing them in music.

There was an existing curriculum available for Nick when he arrived at Beech, created by a local music teacher. Nick then adapted this curriculum to suit his teaching style and knowledge, and modifies it to suit each class of students.

Nick likes the autonomy to create curriculum that he feels is relevant to the kids, and prefers that the curriculum not become prescriptive. This freedom is what allows for creativity, and makes the job exciting for him. He continues: “Basically they're trusting me with my expertise to deliver something to the students that I feel is enriching to them, and I feel that I do a pretty damn good job of that.”

He will continue to develop his courses, and would like to continue to incorporate more technology. During this next school year, Nick will be setting up a Mac lab for music students, beginning with 15 computers funded by his music parents. He sees this as useful primarily for his Grade 8 music exploratory students to work with composition, and notes that, “I would like to explore with

more technology and I think kids are sort of gravitating towards that. I think there's some excitement there.”

The teachers in the school are happy with his exploratory offerings, and are brought in for performances.

Current Reality: Scheduling

Nick feels that the exploratory schedule works really well for him at Beech. Exploratories are offered four times per week and are run over three days. Two classes are 42-minute blocks, and the final class is a double block. Nick splits the double block into two different activities and finds that this works well.

They have recently created an exploratory team, which meets to discuss student issues and planning, which he finds beneficial.

Current Reality: Assessment

Nick uses ongoing assessment, focusing on skills such as character and work ethic. Students do quizzes throughout the course, and complete a self-evaluation as their final assessment.

The final report includes the self-evaluation on the front, a criteria-based rubric on the back, an overall rating of Good, Satisfactory, or Excellent, and a teacher comment.

Some students realize that the course is not grade-based, but he does not frame his course around grades. Nick focuses instead on enrichment and would not want to incorporate grades into music exploratory classes.

Nick finds that the PLOs are quite general and vague, but believes that he is meeting them.

Challenges

The challenges for Nick are the availability of facilities and resources, and the number of report cards to complete.

Nick teaches middle school curriculum to music education university students. At his school, university students have a few classes where they are introduced to his curriculum and the resources of a local retired music educator. He notes, "There's a lot of things to do in general music. I think its modifying it to the age group . . . [and] how to form a curriculum."

Nick feels that these students need to take the initiative to become comfortable with exploratory curriculum and topics, noting:

As far as I'm concerned, university students should be out there. In the music education department, there's only so much that the faculty can offer them. They'd be in university for 10 years if they wanted to do everything that we want to do at school. So I think that they need to be using their own resources and searching things out. In any subject, I think, in band, strings, choir, they've got to bring a skill set. I think the same for general music. It's hard to know what's going to work at one school and what will work in another school and from one teacher to the next."

Benefits

Nick finds that participating in music exploratory courses is quite beneficial to both student and teacher, commenting, "I've noticed that [students] come in cold, not knowing anything and they leave knowing something, some of them having some passion about it, some of them not. It depends on the kids, it

depends on the grade.” It gives them a chance to become excited about playing instruments they have created.

For teachers, these classes provide a change in pace from band classes, where the “teacher is on, 100%, all the time.” He explains,

Band is pretty directive. There's a pretty black and white way of doing things to some degree. There's not a lot of lateral movement there. It's pretty transmissive . . . in terms of: teacher, band, teacher, band. . . . [In] exploratories, you get the opportunity to look at the community of learners, to be more transactive. It's good for the learning environment but also good for the teacher, because as a band teacher you can take a step back and let the kids do a lot of the creative work.

Teachers also have more opportunity to be creative, to connect with students and to build relationships.

Music exploratory courses help to enliven the school culture, and give music teachers the chance to get to know all of the kids in the school.

From a societal standpoint, these courses expose students to a variety of music and cultures, and make them better people. Nick explains:

You know when we talk about Arabic music, and music of the Middle East, kids have no concept of what goes on in the Middle East. And all of a sudden I introduce them to it, and they're like “Wow, that's cool. Look at those drums. Look at the complexities.” It's not all about the fighting. There [are] all kinds of benefits to society, for sure.

Summary

This chapter has provided the results of semi-structured interviews with six music educators in School District #61 on music exploratory classes. The following chapter will present a cross-case analysis of the phenomenon of the music exploratory course.

CHAPTER SIX

Cross-Case Analysis: Themes & Outliers

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore perceptions of music educators and administrators about music exploratory courses in District #61. The previous chapter presented the results of the individual case studies. In this chapter, I will examine the middle school music exploratory courses as a district-wide phenomenon in the following areas: original intent, current reality, challenges, and benefits, looking at common themes and outliers.

Original Intent

Teachers and administrators in School District #61 are united in their understanding of the original intent for offering music exploratory classes to middle schools. The participants use varying terms to describe the purpose of these courses: to explore music, to get students involved in music, exposure to music, getting music to everyone, and giving students a chance to discover music.

Doug takes this one step further to propose that students developing an appreciation for music are more likely to become supporters of music in the future, whether as a patron of the arts, or as an advocate for government support of the arts.

Many of the participants indicate their desire for students to develop a life-long interest or passion in music. This intent is mirrored in the words of Zenker (2004) who proposes:

If we adopt the music education paradigm of educating for a musical life, we harness student imagination, personal experiences, and opinion to assist them in developing the motivation to continue to explore, throughout their lifespan, the variety of music to which they have been introduced. Our goal then is to prepare students for continuing musical engagement and enrichment throughout their lives (pp. 134-135).

Brooke and Kate have had similar experiences to my own, with students choosing to continue learning or playing an instrument after the conclusion of the exploratory course. Some students have continued on ukulele, guitar, or another instrument they have explored, with a few among this number even continuing on to participate in community ensembles. This finding relates to Tia's description of the original intent:

We wanted students to have an opportunity to explore different things, whatever it might be, and see if they had an interest for it. We described exploratories as ways to get kids hooked into something that they might be interested in for their whole life.

Tia's words are echoed by Zenker (2004) who finds this goal to be particularly relevant today:

At the same time as music education is being cut in many school budgets, the baby boom generation is returning to private music lessons. Many students are not being given the opportunity to study music in school, especially at the higher-grade levels unless they are proficient at playing a band or string instrument and can join the band or strings programs. In

many cases students choose not to pursue music in school and instead take guitar, piano, or drums privately because these instruments are not offered in school. Presumably due to public interest, continuing education centers and public music organizations, such as the symphony and the opera, are reaching out to the general public through continuing education programs, which the Vancouver Opera, for example, calls “lifelong learning.” Yet in school we are mostly failing to provide students with a music education that can last throughout their lives by simply not providing them with any music education at all due to budget cuts, or by not providing them with a music education that appeals to their interests. (p. 121)

Findings show that the original intent of music exploratory courses, to expose all middle school students to music, is now being met in some of the schools in School District #61. Kyle, an administrator, notes that, “I wanted to make sure that every student participates in music at some level during the middle school years.” Liam, an administrator, recognizes the intrinsic value of music and the opportunity where, “more kids get exposed to music, even those who don’t choose the optional band/choir/strings program.”

For these few schools, every middle school child is receiving the opportunity to participate in music exploratory classes. Not every middle school child in the district, however, has the opportunity to explore music. In two of the middle schools, only a portion of students participate in music exploratory classes, and in three, music exploratory courses are not offered.

This inconsistency means that there are middle school children in District #61 not benefiting from the opportunity to experience music.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

The decision of which exploratory subjects to offer varies across the district, and is based on student population, class structure, and the preferences of the principals. Home economics and woodshop are consistently offered where facilities exist. Beyond these two courses, schools offer a variety of options, such as computers, drama, music, art, fine arts, foods, and in Hemlock Middle School, a course on money. The courses offered may change every year, or every grade, or stay the same.

Within the music exploratory classes, subject matter is primarily left up to the individual teachers. This autonomy is welcomed by many of the teachers and administrators. The subjects vary according to the teacher's passions, interests, knowledge base, and by what teachers think will appeal to students. Liam explains: "I think that each teacher has her own creativity and way of doing things, and if you're engaging kids in music, I don't want to see it become prescriptive in either direction." Kyle agrees saying, "I think music's one place where we don't need to be very prescriptive. . . The curriculum has to match the teachers, not the teachers matching the curriculum." This does pose a challenge for teachers, who then have to create an entire curriculum and goals for each course.

Cory, Doug, Kyle, and Liam indicate that a 'hands-on,' experiential based process is preferred in music exploratory courses, with Kyle noting, "You want

them to perform in music. It's not just listening, but actually doing.” Doug is specific about stressing that students should learn to play an instrument, and Nick participates in collective music making with students.

Closely related to this idea of experiential learning is the collective desire on the part of the teachers for students to find relevance in the subject matter. The use of popular music and technology are at the forefront of this process.

Popular music has not always been a sanctioned genre for some music teachers. Snell (2009) proposes that, “It is precisely because the music of primary importance in students’ lives is not valued in most current school music classrooms that formal music education remains disconnected from music in every day life” (p. 172). The issue of whether or not to incorporate popular music has been in existence since the times of Plato and Aristotle (Senyshyn, 2004). Senyshyn (2004) describes this dichotomy by stating that, “There has always been a ‘popular’ music, or ‘music of the people’ if you will, and a ‘classical, longhair, serious, historical’ music in western culture” (p. 114-115). Snell (2009) describes popular music as, “the musical language and culture of the students” (p. 173). While I recognize this dichotomy, it is now recognized by numerous scholars (Dunbar-Hall, 1996; Green, 2006; Middleton 1990; Swanwick, 1999) that popular music deserves to be included in school curricula. All of the music teachers in the present study choose to incorporate popular music in their music exploratory classes. Students enjoy and relate to music of their time, and even to some extent, music of their parents’ time such as the Beatles. Senyshyn (2004) concedes that while teachers need to moderate the music for inappropriate

content, or lyrics, perhaps by modifying them or finding alternate songs, it is important to recognize the interests of students. By neglecting this music Senyshyn believes that

we do this at the expense of students' identities and values, which are passionately based on the very music that is, at times, suppressed in one way or another. More precisely, a sense of social justice, love, art, nostalgia, and many other human attributes and values are located in what is referred to as 'popular' music and its collaborative texts. (p. 119)

With respect to technology, teachers also have varying levels of tools incorporated in their courses, based primarily on access to technology and their own level of technological comfort and knowledge. Nick is able to use more recent technology, such as iPads and iPhones in his classroom, which may become more prevalent in other programs with the rise of wireless technology in the schools. Brooke has been able to incorporate the use of cell-phones as a resource for students to research, listen, and play along with songs. Many teachers also use the Internet as a resource both for research and for allowing students to choose their own songs to learn on an instrument. As students are technology savvy, both in and out of school, the ability to incorporate technology into music exploratories assists teachers in connecting with their students, as well as adding a contemporary flavour to their courses.

Findings show that music exploratory teachers in this district use a variety of activities, including guitar, ukulele, and drums to appeal to student interest. Adler & Harrison (2009) encourage the use of similar instruments:

Guitar class facilitates musical participation without direct fear of either competition or necessity of public performance. A strength of this program is its individualization; as with keyboard class, participants can often work at their own pace, on separate and personalized material, and are somewhat freed from the in-class competition which can arise in a band class. (p. 281)

Teachers and administrators note that courses need to be modified with each class. What works for one class, may not work for the next. Nathalie has encountered this in the following circumstance:

You'll have the occasional student or class that makes it really hard, and then you have to tailor what you're doing for them. It surprises me, because I'll have a lesson on lyrics and some classes love that lesson and then some classes don't. It just depends on the group dynamics.

All of the teachers focus on students gaining a better appreciation for music. Nathalie and Cory approach this from an analysis standpoint, where students look at a piece of music and relate it to music from another point in history. Kate, Nick, Doug, and Cory approach this from an understanding of the processes involved in creating a song or a band, and the time and energy involved in becoming a musician. Brooke incorporates daily introductions to different world instruments, and Nick introduces students to music from the Middle East and Pacific Rim. While each teacher has her own manner of introducing students to music, the very act of participating in some form of music course ensures an enhanced understanding and appreciation for music.

The common theme from all participants is that teachers have to have an interest and passion for the course being taught, so that students can catch this passion and enjoy the course. Kyle notes that, “You get 10 weeks to strike a match, to make that connection. You’ve got nothing to lose. Nothing whatsoever to lose and everything to gain.”

Current Reality: Assessment

There is no norm for music exploratory course assessment in the district. Each teacher designs her own assessment goals and tools, and creates her own report card insert.

Teachers use a variety of rating scales for their final assessment. Cory uses a 1-4 scale, which translates directly to ratings of Not Yet Meeting, Minimally Meeting, Fully Meeting, and Exceeding Expectations. Brooke uses a 1-5 scale for assessment and effort marks of Satisfactory, Good, and Excellent. Doug, Kate, and Nick use student self-evaluations, which they modify for their own evaluation (see Appendix 5 for an example of Kate’s self-evaluation form). Liam, an administrator, describes these modified self-evaluations: “The kids assess themselves and the teachers sign it, but they might change one or two ratings where they disagree with the kids’ self-assessment. They might change a circle to a square, or use a red pen, something to show the teacher’s perception vs. the student’s.”

On the back of these, Doug adds a copy of student playing test results, comments, and an effort mark of Not Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Good, or Excellent. Nick puts a criteria rubric on the back, and a rating of Satisfactory,

Good, or Excellent. On the back, Kate has the student self-evaluation, using ratings of Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Good, and Excellent, and adds teacher comments. Nathalie gives students an effort mark for every project, using ratings of Needs Improvement, Good, Satisfactory, and Excellent. For the report card, she adds an overall effort grade and a teacher comment. In my own program, I use a rating scale of 1-4 with Insufficient Effort, Minimally Meeting, Fully Meeting, and Exceeding Expectations, and an overall letter grade, which is a school requirement.

In addition to designing the curriculum, it takes a considerable amount of effort and time for exploratory teachers to determine how and what they want to assess, and what the final assessment should look like.

A final assessment is required for each student in exploratory class, which for many exploratory teachers means writing a report card for every child in the school. For music teachers who often run large programs, this task presents an additional challenge. Brooke, Cory, Doug, Kate, and Nick identified the large number of report cards they are required to complete as a complication. This finding correlates with my own experience, where I routinely complete approximately 1000 report cards per year: approximately 330 inserts every term for band and exploratory courses. For music teachers, the challenge of assessment adds to existing out of school time commitments required for performances, fundraising, parent group meetings, and administration and planning aspects of music programs.

The varied forms of assessment across the district raises the larger question of what type of assessment music exploratory courses should have: formative or summative. Elliott (1995) explains that formative assessment uses a variety of cues and languages to give students constructive feedback about the quality of their efforts-in-the-moment. This casts music educators in the role of coaches who guide students by targeting their attention to key details of their musicing, by adjusting their acts of musicing and listening, and by cueing them to reflect critically about their musical actions. (p. 173)

In contrast, Elliot (1995) notes that summative assessment usually requires [us] to step back from our students' efforts in order to examine, test, judge, and other-wise reduce their musicing and listening to brief, fragmented tests of isolated skills and facts that we can "describe" as numerical grades and/or brief verbal reports. (p. 173)

Kyle is a supporter of teacher judgement, noting "You know, I think that there's just something inherent when you sit back and you say 'somehow in my own mind, putting it all together, this kid was worth an A.'" At first glance, he appears to be a supporter of summative assessment, where the teacher compiles her thoughts and observations to describe the child's results. However, Kyle expands his thought process and notes, "That's what, to me, a great music teacher does, it isn't evaluating, it is constantly providing feedback." In actual fact, Kyle prefers formative assessment, which supports the importance he places on the experience of the exploratory class, and the seeming lack of

importance on the assessment. The reality is that with music exploratories, the content and the experience are deemed more important than the assessment or feedback.

Smith and Levin (1996, as cited in Colwell, 2003) propose multiple purposes for assessment:

Among these are providing motivation for students and teachers by recognizing the effects of hard work and good practice: supplying information and feedback for teachers and principals to improve their practice; creating capacity-building opportunities for teachers that enable them to engage in learning; and instituting rewards and sanctions. (p. 14)

For music exploratory courses, Liam explains that report cards, “provide the feedback for the students and parents. The effort’s on there. The skill development’s on there, and they’re all individualized. So the food one is different than the music one.”

Smith and Levin (1996, as cited in Colwell, 2003) explain that, “Assessment is useful as an indicator to inform whether goals are being reached and to provide information on which elements of the curriculum are attained and which are not” (p. 14). In the music exploratory model, this is problematic in that there is no set curriculum. Teachers are creating assessment tools and reports without guidance on what the district and province hope to achieve with these courses.

Results from this study show that administrators and a few teachers favour teacher autonomy in assessment, while other teachers request further guidance in this area.

Challenges

Not all students will enter a music exploratory class with an open mind. All of the teacher participants find this to be a reality of the music exploratory experience, a reality shared by classroom teachers. Kyle notes that,

There's nothing harder, and I believe it to be true, then telling a group of 30 students who have no interest in music whatsoever, they purposefully chose not to take music in Grade 6, "Hey guys, we are all going to play the ukulele and have fun." But I don't expect a return rate of 100%.

Protheroe (2004, as cited in Sanacore, 2008) finds that "reluctant learners do not complete tasks, do avoid challenges, and are satisfied with just getting by. They are often capable of excelling but do not seem concerned about achieving in school" (p. 40). It is up to the music teachers to try to engage these reluctant students. Music exploratory courses, in particular, can be the perfect tool to actively engage these students. Sanacore (2008) supports this premise, finding that, "Reluctant learners, in particular, benefit from intrinsic motivation that makes learning relevant to their lives" (p. 40). Sanacore (2008) provides the following suggestions to engage these students:

- 1) Create a learning environment that is encouraging and challenging
- 2) Provide students with opportunities to make learning choices
- 3) Increase student's participation in classroom activities

4) Encourage students to love learning (pp. 41-43)

Liam recognizes this challenge for music teachers who are used to teaching elective courses. He explains: "It's not self-selecting, and I think that could be an issue sometimes if you've only taught band or choir which tend to bring kids that want to be there. Some of these teachers have less of the classroom management skills."

Cory, Doug, Kate, Liam, and Nathalie echo Liam's words pointing to the challenge of classroom management. Band teachers are used to a large volume of sound, and have developed tools and classroom techniques to manage the sound, usually by working as one large ensemble. The challenge with music exploratory classes comes when students are broken into smaller groups. In a traditional classroom, students can work quite well in small groups. The main difficulty in exploratory classes, however, occurs when students are also learning and playing instruments, either individually, or in groups. Aside from the volume, some middle school students are not used to working in the music room in this independent manner, as noted by Nathalie, who comments, "It's difficult to have them rehearse, though, in one room with 4-6 groups, if they all want to use the drum set. It just gets crazy."

This challenge is amplified, as noted by a number of the participants, by a lack of Education Assistant support. Doug comments, "I find that a lot of the times the Education Assistants [EAs] in the class, they don't feel that they can help out because it's something that they don't know how to do, because it's like they don't play guitar. So sometimes I find that the EA's leave," an occurrence

that has been regularly replicated in my own exploratory classes. For example, one of my classes this year had six designated students and two assigned EAs, but in exploratory class, there was only one EA present for a small portion of each class. Given the added distraction and change in structure from a traditional classroom, the EA support is needed even more in exploratory course than in a regular classroom.

Brooke, Cory, Kate, and Nathalie noted the challenge associated with curriculum. With classroom teachers, curriculum goals and resources are available for use, including textbooks, assignments, lesson plans, and assessment tools. Their report card format is already created on the British Columbia enterprise Student Information System (BCeSIS) [provincial report card program], and there are other teachers to approach for further resources on a specific topic. With exploratory courses, all of the resources, curriculum goals, content, lesson plans, assignments, assessments, and report cards need to be teacher-created. This challenge is multiplied when teachers have three exploratory courses to create. If teachers are moving to new schools, or are new to the job, they generally only have a few days to create these courses before school starts. These four teachers propose that some curriculum planning time be set aside for exploratory teachers.

Findings also indicated that a lack of teacher training in music exploratory courses was common across all participants. Due to the relatively new concept of music exploratory courses and the fact that they are not offered across the province, this is not an unexpected result. Tia notes that, "Usually, the people

that are in those positions are qualified for their positions. So, music teachers have a music background.” In essence, music teachers are given skills in music. However, King (2002) proposes that,

Inexperienced and pre-service teachers spend much of their time acquiring information and knowledge often resulting in less time being devoted to exploring ways to ‘engage’ the students we work with so they can make meaning of the material presented (p. 206).

This presents a challenge to new teachers, particularly those who have not experienced a music exploratory class setting. Seddon (2004) notes that “teachers who, understandably, do not feel confident engaging in music education practices that fall outside of their own areas of expertise often unintentionally impede this potential inclusivity” (p. 217).

The University of Victoria, as noted by Nick, has started to offer small segments, or observations, of a few exploratory classes to give students an idea of what to expect. However, as Nick notes, it is really up to each of these new teachers to decide what content they wish to offer.

Brooke and Cory shared their perceptions that music exploratory courses are not always valued within the school. Their findings correlate to Garvin (1994), who found: “Exploratory teachers sometimes see themselves as baby-sitters, watching over students to provide teams of core teachers with common planning time” (p. 117). There are a number of other possible reasons for this perception, such as a lack of feedback, courses not being included in report cards and therefore not being perceived by other staff and even the music exploratory

teachers themselves as valuable, and even student perceptions that because a course is not graded, it has no importance.

Benefits

Music exploratory courses offer a chance to engage students not interested in a performance stream. For the students who choose to participate in elective music ensembles, exploratory courses offer alternative experiences in music. Seddon (2004) notes that many students who play in large ensembles do not continue on with these instruments later in life, and many stop playing during their teenage years. North, Hargreaves & O'Neill, (2000, as cited in Seddon, 2004) find that, "This dropout rate is not as a result of losing interest in music per se as music remains central to the lives of most adolescents" (p. 213).

Nick and Cory commented on the enjoyment students receive while working together in small groups, creating and learning music. The relaxed atmosphere, and safe creative environment can encourage students to experiment with music, a process that can be continued through life. Seddon (2004) lends support to this view stating: "Motivation for continuing involvement with music making in these informal settings results from feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment achieved through experiencing musical and social interaction during the process rather than external evaluation of the product" (p. 216).

Nathalie notes that exploratory classes offer the opportunity to connect with students in a more relaxed atmosphere than a traditional classroom.

Kennedy (2004) proposes:

I am advocating a playful music room where teacher and student take time to try another approach, create a new ending, spontaneously walk down the hall in the middle of a lesson to sing/play for the principal. It's the classroom where teacher and students feel free to interject a new idea and try it out on the spot, the classroom where teacher and students are joint adventurers on the road, the classroom where teacher and students take time to enjoy the ride that will make the grade in the 21st century. Children and young people fortunate enough to experience such a classroom will carry their ability to be fun-loving and child-*like* [sic] into adulthood where it will be a valuable resource for living. (p. 71)

While Kennedy is referring primarily to performance-based ensembles, the experience described above seems appropriate and ideal for music exploratory classes. Brooke has experimented with this process by adding more spontaneity into daily song selections, instrument bingo, and impromptu performances for the office. Cory and Nick incorporate improvisation into their courses, for students to explore and create. Nathalie and I work with students to create lyrics and to write songs for the guitar. While performance ensembles provide benefits to their participants, perhaps music exploratory class has the option to appeal to every student when teachers are willing to experiment and focus on student enjoyment.

Kyle notes that exploratory classes also offer an opportunity to reduce gender stereotypes by having all of the students participate in classes such as woodworking or home economics. In a research study on music education gender issues, Hanley (1998) notes that: "Students bring their well-shaped

gender roles to school with them; social expectations exert a powerful force on students” (p. 59). Both boys and girls face the social pressure of pre-conceived stereotypes and gender roles (Black, 2009; Hanley, 1998). For girls, Hanley (1998) notes that, “As their self-esteem diminishes so do their confidence and willingness to express themselves in school and take risks in classroom settings. Social popularity takes ascendance over academic accomplishment” (p. 63).

Black (2009) also discusses gender equality, looking at both teachers and students within a school, suggesting that teachers and administrators focus on the messages being delivered to children, both literally and subliminally. He places the responsibility on schools and society to be proactive:

If gender equality is truly a desired societal outcome and educational organizations are expected to contribute significantly to its reality, both educational organizations and society as a whole have to make radical changes in how members of society are socialized and educated about gender, gender relationships, and gender equality. (p. 16)

Within the music class, a fairly new gender stereotype has arisen, which can actually help teachers encourage a connection with boys and music. Adler & Harrison (2009) note that, “the guitar’s connections to the highly heterosexualized world of rock music also facilitate the building of a masculine public identity, which further serves to aid in recruitment” (p. 281).

The change in structure from large ensemble to individualized-learning is found to be a benefit for students. Adler & Harrison (2009) note that, “guitar class facilitates musical participation while maintaining interpersonal distancing by

removing expectations for making music with others” (p. 281). Many of the music exploratory teachers in this study, however, choose to keep the group creativity and performance options in their classes. Doug offers students the option to perform their songs privately to the teacher prior to the class performance, for those students who are uncomfortable with performing for others. By maintaining performances within the guitar class, students can have the benefit of individual and group learning, as well as maintaining the experiences of public performance in a safe and non-threatening environment.

All of the participating teachers noted the benefit of connecting with at-risk students. The class format tends to allow for more one-on-one time with the teacher, a variety of independent and inter-dependent learning, and topics that appeal to many different skill-sets and abilities. Many teachers referred to examples where students struggled in their advisory classrooms, only to succeed and even excel in music exploratory classes. Nathalie shared her experiences with entire classes that were able to ‘buy-in’ to the atmosphere and topics, which then resulted in a more positive environment within that class.

Music exploratory classes can enrich school culture, an objective identified by Tia. Brooke and Nick note that one of the unique advantages of being a music exploratory teacher is the potential to meet and connect with every child in the school. For the children, this gives them one teacher with whom they have a connection throughout their middle school years. Students who have a strong connection with teachers develop a strong connection with the school, which improves things such as attendance, atmosphere, and morale within the school.

Due to the nature of music classes, students will have three years to fully incorporate aspects such as teamwork, cooperation, respect, musical etiquette, and responsibility.

Music exploratory classes also offer a change of pace for music teachers, who, as Nick and Nathalie note, are used to being 'on' 100% of the time. In a band, teachers have a large number of students, all playing different instruments. Unless a middle school is fortunate enough to have a number of practice rooms, students can't work independently or in small groups due to the ensuing noise. Accordingly, band teachers tend to work with the entire class for the majority of the lesson. The quieter nature of guitars and ukuleles allow for students, with guidance, to work on their own, giving the teacher a chance to work one-on-one with students, or to step back and observe.

Liam notes that music exploratory courses "add to the richness of our overall music program, making it a fuller program." As an example, Liam shares that,

Kids were coming home saying "Yeah. I know I'm in band, choir, and strings, but man is it fun to go in there and do this African Drumming. I'm learning guitar now, and we don't do guitar in band, except maybe one kid on bass."

Findings show that engaging students, therefore, enhances student, teacher, and school enrichment.

Summary

This chapter represented the cross-district analysis of merged findings from teachers and administrators in School District #61. Many of the findings were replicated in middle schools across the district, including beliefs on the original intent, current reality, challenges, and benefits. There is some debate in areas of assessment and curriculum, which will be discussed in Chapter 7, presenting Conclusions and Implications for Music Education.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions & Implications For Music Education

Introduction

The past three chapters provided a summary of research undertaken with six music exploratory teachers and three administrators in School District #61. As a music teacher new to the concept of music exploratory courses, my personal offerings have been based on a trial and error system. I designed this research study to see if other music teachers were having similar experiences, and to determine the original intent of these courses. In this chapter, I will revisit my initial research questions in the light of my findings and offer my conclusions. The chapter will conclude with some recommendations to the school district and resulting implications for music education.

Research Questions

1) Do music exploratory courses meet the developmental needs of middle school students?

Music exploratory courses effectively meet the developmental needs of middle school students. The benefits of these connections are wide-ranging, assisting with the child's self-confidence, morale, perceived social standing, connection to the school, and general well-being and happiness. For these reasons alone, it is important to ensure that every middle school child has access to music exploratory courses.

Music exploratory classes are also clearly reaching the students that need support. This research shows numerous examples where students with

behavioural and learning challenges respond to and connect with music exploratory offerings.

2) Do music exploratory courses appeal to middle school students?

Findings from this research suggest that music exploratory courses are well received by students. Our Superintendent of Schools (personal communication August 18, 2011) describes the 7 Cs of 21st century learning: “Collaboration, careers, critical thinking, communication, creativity, cross-cultural understanding, and caring for personal health.” With the exception of careers, music exploratory teachers are experimenting with these 7 Cs, without even recognizing them as goals for exploratory programs. Teachers are simply using their knowledge and expertise to design courses that work for them, and for their students.

Findings show that music exploratory teachers are keeping student relevance in mind as they create their courses. Popular music, technology, student input into course material, and student-centered environments are prevalent in these classes. Teachers are moving away from the traditional teacher-centered performance model to a more interdependent environment, where students often take the lead in their own learning.

Several teachers noted that there were students continuing on with their instruments after the course had been completed, demonstrating that, for these students, the connection between student and music had been made. All of the teachers observed student enjoyment within the classrooms.

3) What was the original intent of these courses?

The original intent of middle school music exploratory courses was to provide an opportunity for all middle school students to explore music. The research findings show that this intent is being implemented for the most part. Many middle school students in SD #61 have the opportunity to explore and experience music in middle school. Not all of the middle schools, however, offer music exploratory classes, and two of the schools offer music exploratory classes to only part of their school population.

4) Are music teachers in this district aware of the goals and philosophy of exploratory courses?

Music teachers are aware of their own individually crafted goals and philosophies for music exploratory courses. There are, however, no set goals at a district or provincial level, aside from the original intent.

5) Are music exploratory courses providing a solid foundation in music?

The question of whether or not students are receiving a solid music foundation is debatable. Students are receiving a short burst of music for 6 to 10 weeks of the year. This is better than nothing. I would, however, argue that continued musical exposure over long periods of time is necessary for developing foundational skills and knowledge. These courses are not intended to create a solid foundation, but rather to give students a taste of music, and hopefully entice them to learn more.

6) How are teachers approaching the exploratory model?

Music teachers are approaching these courses using their expertise and musical training as the foundation. Most teachers are offering subject matter that utilizes their own knowledge base and comfort level. Some teachers have used existing curricula designed by a local teacher as a starting point, and have amended this course to suit their own interests and teaching style. To some extent, music teachers also borrow ideas from each other, although this could be expanded further.

7) Can traditional performance courses such as band, choir, and strings operate in conjunction with music exploratory courses?

Findings show that music exploratory courses enrich existing music programs within the schools. These courses allow music teachers to connect with students they may not have met or worked with before, and students have the opportunity to become comfortable within a music environment. The research shows that while a few students have chosen to join elective music offerings as a result of taking music exploratory classes, it has not proven to be a recruitment tool for music departments. Further research would be required to explore the idea of using exploratory courses as a recruitment method.

8) Are courses being offered in specific areas or skills?

Courses are being offered with a variety of options. For instance, four teachers teach guitar classes, two teachers offer ukulele classes, one teacher offers a drum class, one teacher has a musical theatre option, two teachers offer

courses looking at a specific music genre or geographic area, and a number of teachers use a variation on a former teacher's world music curriculum.

Many teachers incorporate composition skills, and performance skills in their courses. Independent and small group learning is utilized in most of the music exploratory courses, and all of the courses involve an experientially-based design.

9) Are teachers approaching music exploratory courses in a sequential manner?

The research shows that the majority of courses are free-standing; meaning that one course does not lead to the next. Occasionally, if a school offers two years of guitar, the second course may build on the first course. It may, however, be more than a year between courses for these students, as noted by Doug, so the second course will incorporate a substantial review.

10) Are teachers choosing curriculum based on the developmental needs of the children?

Findings show that music teachers do keep the developmental needs of children in mind when creating these courses, primarily through experimentation with subject matter. For example, Kate experimented for one year with switching her music exploratory courses. Her Grade 6/7 split class played guitar for that one year, for example, while her Grade 8 class experimented with musical theatre. At the end of that year, she determined that the courses needed to be switched back, as the Grade 6 students struggled with the size of the guitars for

their hands, the independent learning required, and the length of time focusing on one instrument.

11) Is there a standard requirement for assessment across the district?

There is no standard requirement for music exploratory course assessment.

All three administrators have clearly stated their preference for assessment in these courses to be left up to the teacher. Stepping back and looking at this issue from an administrative viewpoint, this is a valid argument. All Grade 7 math courses across the district have the same curriculum. For these math courses, it makes sense to have a standard curriculum and learning outcomes. In contrast, every school and every exploratory teacher in the district offers separate courses with varying topics.

12) How are teachers approaching the challenges of assessment?

Teachers in this study are mixed in their reactions when it comes to assessment. Some prefer the autonomy of designing their own assessment, and some have requested some guidelines. My conclusion from listening to these teachers is that their main priority is reducing the amount of time needed to complete these report cards due to the large number of students they teach, and the time conflicts with their other responsibilities.

The very intent of music exploratory courses is for students to enjoy music. Any form of assessment arguably takes away from student enjoyment. Does this mean these course should not be assessed? Absolutely not. It does,

however, mean that this assessment needs to be practical and relevant to students, parents, and teachers.

13) Are teachers addressing prescribed government music standards?

Findings indicate that while music exploratory teachers are aware of the BC Government Prescribed Learning Outcomes, they do not specifically incorporate them into music exploratory courses. The Learning Outcomes do not recognize the middle school model of Grades 6 through 8; instead the outcomes are separated into two groups, Grades K-7, and 8-12. There are no Prescribed Learning Outcomes for exploratory courses, and the short timeline of exploratories do not allow for all of the year-long music outcomes to be addressed.

Suggestions for Change

Based on the positive results achieved to date, the music exploratory program can easily be expanded across the district to ensure that all students receive the opportunity to participate in music experiences outside of elective courses in middle school.

Current Reality: Subject Matter

Teachers could be assisted by the establishment of a resource pool for exploratory teachers to draw on, incorporating curriculum and assessment templates. This resource would allow new teachers to avoid 're-creating the wheel' with every course they design, and assist current teachers with ideas and

lesson plans with which to experiment. Ideally, this would be an on-line resource tool, perhaps using computer portals.

Five of the six teachers in this study were given very little guidance or time to create these courses, which also reflects my own experience. The creation of the above resource pool would reduce the amount of planning time used by every teacher, many of whom are required to design three full curricula in a short period of time.

Music exploratory teachers across the district should carve out time to meet and share ideas and challenges, perhaps during district-wide professional development days. As Tia notes, “Music teachers like to network and learn from one another and so I think the sky's the limit, really.”

Current Reality: Assessment - Goals

While some teachers and administrators enjoy the autonomy of designing courses with no prescribed goals or criteria, teachers new to music exploratory program area, however, prefer the establishment of some district goals for these courses to assist with course design and assessment.

The research clearly shows that teachers are struggling with the time commitments involved in creating assessment tools. The resource pool mentioned above would assist teachers in this area.

Current Reality: Assessment - Report Cards

Teachers have demonstrated the need to reduce the amount of time spent on hundreds of report cards each term, particularly as these are generally completed on teacher's personal time. My recommendation is that teachers meet

to design a standard report card template, using one rating scale across the district, with the aim of reducing time and establishing consistency.

Alternatively, and perhaps ideally, exploratory classes could be added to existing report cards. Student classes are already set up on BCeSIS, so all that needs to happen, theoretically, is to add exploratory courses as subjects, and exploratory teachers be given access to BCeSIS. This would significantly reduce report card time for exploratory teachers as they would not be creating and completing one and two page reports. This would also establish reporting consistency for parents, substantially reduce paper use, and would reflect the course value as an educational experience. The student assessment could be reflected as an effort mark on the report card, or included in the comments, depending upon what the assessment goals are determined to be. As Tia notes:

Effort is one thing, which isn't a letter grade, and they're not connected.

You don't want them combined, but to have something that has effort on it is important, so that parents can see where their kid is with whatever the expectation is within the classroom.

Challenges: Exploratory Teams

Nick has identified the benefits of creating exploratory teams within the schools, providing exploratory teachers with a support network, reducing the reality of isolationism experienced by exploratory teachers, and allowing time to discuss student issues and exploratory goals within the school. This could be a direction for teachers to investigate within their schools.

Implications for Music Education

Secondary School

At the Middle School level, music exploratories offer students the opportunity to learn in varied environments, through individual and group learning. This could lead more students to continue on in high school music, particularly if secondary teachers are amenable to expanding their programs to include non-traditional offerings. Kyle notes that:

I know, it's clear, we put a lot of pressure on middle schools to make our high schools more successful. I think that you see that in our high schools. I think that you see kids who have developed a love for different things and they're more mature now after three years in middle school, being told that it's okay to do this. It's okay to do that.

Bruenger (2004) supports this statement, commenting:

We do a good job of reaching all students on the elementary level. It is in early adolescence when students are beginning to feel vulnerable about their limitations that many students lose interest in making music (p. 204).

Foundation

While students are benefiting from these short-term music explorations, the courses are, for the most part, disconnected. Students not participating in elective music courses are learning specific skills and tasks without a sequential, consistent curriculum. Further research is required to determine the effects of these shortened courses on student knowledge and musical understanding.

Goals and Assessment

This research showed that administrators and some of the teachers prefer complete autonomy when it comes to curriculum and assessment. Further research will be needed to determine if the lack of established local and provincial standards helps or hinders the educational process. In addition, research will be required to determine what type of assessment is appropriate for this model.

Reflection

My personal understanding of music exploratory courses has been greatly enhanced through this research process. This, in turn, has influenced what and how I teach in the classroom. The research into different philosophies and varied experiences in music education completed during the graduate program have caused me to question the way I approach student interaction, curriculum planning, assessment, and my own beliefs. Rather than relying on 'tried and true' processes, I began to question the intention and use of these processes.

Through the research process, I learned how to sift through available articles and books to ascertain resources pertaining to this study. I learned how to synthesize the materials and began to form a broader conception of music exploratory courses.

The steps required to initiate this research were crucial in forming my own understanding of how this research would proceed, and how it would be analyzed. My knowledge level of creating research papers has improved dramatically, and I have expanded my knowledge of various research methods.

Through this process, I came to realize that some of my assumptions proved to be incorrect. Prior to this research, I assumed that music exploratory courses were offered across the province, and that they had been in existence for many years. The research showed that these courses are relatively new, both to the district, and to the few districts incorporating these courses in the province. I also assumed that every middle school child in this district received music exploratory classes, which proved to be a misconception.

As a result of this process, I have gained a stronger insight into music exploratory courses and will return to my students with a broader understanding of how these courses are being offered across the district. I plan to continue to experiment and develop my own curriculum and resources, and to continue working and sharing with my music colleagues, who, thankfully, keep the needs and interests of students at the forefront of music exploratory courses.

I have to admit to being somewhat skeptical about these courses when I first started teaching them, simply because I had no idea what they were about. As a teacher, these courses now provide some of the most enjoyable musical experiences of my day, a reality also noted by many of the participants in this study.

Music is, arguably, the one subject taught in school that people use every day of their lives. Music pervades popular culture, surrounds us as we move through our day, and has an inherent ability to access human emotion. The purpose of music exploratory classes, to allow children to simply participate and enjoy music, is incalculable, both in their everyday situations, and as they

progress in life. Music exploratory classes are a perfect fit for the middle school age group, although in an ideal world, students would be able to explore music throughout the year.

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APPENDIX 1
 THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC EXPLORATORY
 EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL DISTRICT #61
 ADMIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BIOGRAPHICAL

1. How long have you been an educator?
2. How long have you been in admin?
3. What is the nature of your exposure to music exploratories?

INTENT

4. What was/is the intent of music exploratories (or exploratories in general)?
 - a. What do you hope the students will get out of these classes?
5. What do you see as the value of music exploratories in your school?

CURRENT REALITY

6. What's going on in music exploratories now?
 - a. What is being offered to students?
 - b. What feedback have you received about music exploratories from parents, students, teachers, administration, etc?
 - c. How well are these exploratories meeting the intent as you described it earlier?
 - d. How would you like to see music exploratories evolve?

CHALLENGES

7. How do you decide which type of exploratories to offer in the schools (home ec, art, music, etc)
 - a. What can be offered that will appeal to the full range of students?
 - b. Should there be a focus on topics that appeal to students with relevance to the current musical offerings in society (i.e. pop music, guitar)?
8. How are students assessed in exploratory courses?
 - a. Are the students in your exploratory courses assessed with a letter grade? Why or why not?
 - b. Describe to what extent the BC Government Prescribed Learning Outcomes are, or should be, incorporated into music exploratory courses.
9. In your experience, what training are music teachers given to teach music exploratory courses?
10. What do you see as the challenges within music exploratories in your school?

OPPORTUNITIES

11. What do you see as the benefits for students, schools, teachers, etc?
12. In your experience, do you see a societal benefit with these courses?

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC EXPLORATORY
EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL DISTRICT #61
TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BIOGRAPHICAL

1. How long have you been an educator?
2. How long have you been teaching music?
 - a. How long have you been teaching music exploratories?

INTENT

3. What was/is the intent of music exploratories (or exploratories in general)?
 - a. What do you hope the students will get out of these classes?
4. What do you see as the value of music exploratories in your school?

CURRENT REALITY

5. What's going on in music exploratories now?
 - a. What is being offered to students?
 - b. What feedback have you received about music exploratories from parents, students, teachers, administration, etc?
 - c. How well are these exploratories meeting the intent as you described it earlier?
 - d. How would you like to see music exploratories evolve?

CHALLENGES

6. How do you decide what curriculum to cover in your music exploratories?
 - a. What can be offered that will appeal to the full range of students?
 - b. Should there be a focus on topics that appeal to students with relevance to the current musical offerings in society (i.e. pop music, guitar)?
7. How are students assessed in exploratory courses?
 - a. Are the students in your exploratory courses assessed with a letter grade? Why or why not?
 - b. Describe to what extent the BC Government Prescribed Learning Outcomes are, or should be, incorporated into music exploratory courses.
8. In your experience, what training are music teachers given to teach music exploratory courses?
9. What do you see as the challenges within music exploratories in your school?

OPPORTUNITIES

10. What do you see as the benefits for students, schools, teachers, etc?
11. In your experience, do you see a societal benefit with these courses?

APPENDIX 2

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

May 15, 2011

Participant Name
School or Department Name
Street Address
Victoria, BC

Dear Participant:

I am conducting a study on the middle school music exploratory experience in School District #61 as my master's project for the University of Victoria. The purpose of this project is to examine perceptions of middle school music exploratory courses in School District #61. You have been selected based on your experience with Middle School Music Exploratory classes.

I am hoping to interview you at a time and place of your choosing to discuss your thoughts on the intent, current reality, benefits, and challenges of music exploratory courses in the district.

The interview should last approximately one half-hour to an hour and will be audio-recorded and transcribed for data collection purposes. No participant names will be specifically identified in the study and all interviews will remain confidential.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you should not feel obliged or pressured to participate ased on pre-existing professional relationships. Should you choose to participate, your insight will be valuable to new and current music exploratory teachers and to administrators as we gain a stronger understanding of the challenges and benefits of offering exploratory courses in our schools.

If you are able to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and contact me at your convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Pamela Gerrits

APPENDIX 3
THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC EXPLORATORY EXPERIENCE
IN SCHOOL DISTRICT #61
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled: **The Middle School Music Exploratory Experience in School District #61** that is being conducted by Pamela Gerrits, a graduate student in the department of Education at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have further questions by calling 250-516-0645. As a graduate student, this research is part of the requirements for a Master of Education degree and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Benjamin Bolden. You may contact the supervisor at 250-721-7598.

The purpose of this research project is:

This qualitative research project examines stakeholders' perceptions of middle school music exploratory courses in School District #61. I will conduct semi-structured interviews with teachers, administrators, and the originators of the middle school model in this district. These eight individuals will be asked to discuss their perceptions of the intent, current reality, benefits, and challenges of exploratory courses, with a specific focus on music exploratory courses. I will analyze the data for emergent themes and trends that contribute to an understanding of the current status of middle school music exploratories in this district.

Research of this type is important because:

Research on exploratory courses in the middle school system is sparse, with the primary focus on this research tending to be curriculum based. Anfara and Brown (2000), citing Bergman (1992), note: "Research on exploratory programs has typically focused on what programs are offered, how frequently they are offered, and the trends in how the exploratory program is incorporated into the school day and schedule – design and implementation issues" (p. 58). Decisions on what courses and topics will be offered within the exploratory model vary from school to school (Brazeo, 2000; MENC, 1994). There is a need for continued study in the areas of purpose, value and assessment.

The qualitative multiple case study being proposed will look at the effectiveness of these six to ten week courses in music. The study will examine differences between the original intent of these courses and their current status in School District #61.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

Interviews will occur at the participants' school or at a location acceptable to the participants. A series of questions will be used to guide the interview, however the interview will be open to further discussion outside of these questions. The initial questions will focus on the participant's perception of the purpose of music exploratories to establish an open-ended discussion.

Each interview will last approximately one half-hour to an hour. The researcher will clarify the participant's responses throughout the interview.

Audio recordings of the interviews will be taken and transcribed by the researcher. These transcripts will then be provided to the participant for clarification on interpretation and intent. The participant will be contacted by telephone for further clarification, if required.

Participants will be asked to review these transcripts for clarification and intent. This will occur by email, or in-person, at your convenience.

It is anticipated that participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you involving the requirement of your time for the interview. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include

It is anticipated that the results of this study will provide music exploratory teachers with an understanding of the purpose of these classes, ideas and suggestions for improving their course offerings, as well as suggestions on avoiding pitfalls associated with these classes. New teachers may be able to use these results to help guide their creation of a music exploratory curriculum.

Administrators may be able to use the results of this study for an understanding of the challenges and benefits of offering exploratory courses in their schools.

School districts looking into the exploratory model may be able to use this research to guide their development of exploratory courses in areas such as timetabling, curriculum design, and assessment.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used and will be destroyed. In terms of protecting your anonymity and your confidentiality the data will be protected in the following ways:

Pseudonyms will be used to allow for anonymity. No participant names will be specifically identified in the study. Due to the limited number of music teachers and administrators in School District #61, it is not possible to maintain complete anonymity. However, as participants review their transcripts, they will have the option to remove any data they do not wish to include in the study. All interviews will remain confidential. The researcher will transcribe interviews and transcripts will be identified by code numbers. The content of the interviews and transcript clarification discussions will be kept in strict confidence by the researcher and faculty supervisor. There are no other planned uses of this data.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways:

Preparation of a master's project, published papers, presentation at meetings and seminars. A copy of this report will be provided to School District #61.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher [and, if applicable, the supervisor] at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

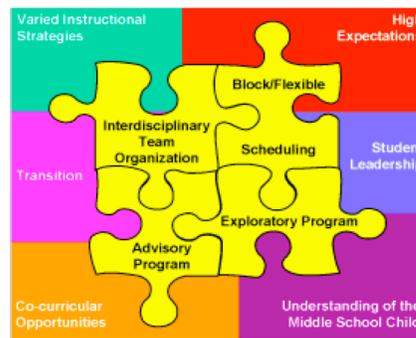
A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER

APPENDIX 4

MIDDLE SCHOOL PUZZLE PIECE PAGE



Personalizing Schools: Organizing for Success



Greater Victoria Middle Schools

Middle Schools in Greater Victoria are committed to each student's success in learning within a responsive and safe environment. Victoria middle school staff hold high expectations for student achievement while providing a program that takes into consideration the unique characteristics of the middle school child. Instructional strategies appropriate for this age group are utilized to teach the grade level learning outcomes. Middle school staff also emphasize grade transition, student leadership and co-curricular opportunities for all students.

The following are essential attributes in our *exemplary* middle schools.

Interdisciplinary Team Organization:

- Students are grouped in teams to provide a source of identity and belonging essential for this age group.
- Students are assigned a teacher advisor.
- Teachers and support staff pool their expertise, resources, interests, and knowledge of students to jointly take responsibility for meeting the educational needs of a common group of our students.
- Teachers have common planning time where they collaborate, discussing student achievement, curriculum and assessment.

Block/Flexible Scheduling:

- Team time is organized to provide maximum flexibility for teaching and learning.
- A flexible schedule is created by teacher teams to meet the educational needs of their students.

Advisory Program:

- The Greater Victoria middle school experience includes an Advisory program where groups of students meet with a teacher in a peer setting to discuss common issues and/or concerns. This time each day allows students to form a significant relationship with a staff member while interacting with peers.

Exploratory Program:

- Exploratory programs are designed to develop and expand every student's personal interests and skills and will be offered through scheduled classes and special events.
- Exploratory programs allow students to participate in a variety of curricular experiences such as fine arts (general music, drama, dance), applied skills (tech ed, home economics) and information technology (computer skills, data management).

Band will be offered as an elective at each middle school (6-8)

Modification to this document is not permitted without prior written consent from the Greater Victoria School District.

APPENDIX 5

GUITAR SELF-EVALUATION SAMPLE

Fine Arts Exploratory 8 – Guitar

Name: _____

Division: _____

This year your son/daughter has had the opportunity to challenge themselves on the guitar. I was pleased to see an increased understanding of music and song from all students and especially from those students who had no prior music experience. In guitar class they were taught:

- Parts of the guitar
- How sound is produced
- String names
- Introduction to musical theory, notation and tuning
- TAB
- Commonly used guitar chords
- Various strumming patterns
- Some notable guitarists
- Various pop, rock and folk songs

Self Evaluation

Your son/daughter has given themselves a mark based on how they believed they did in this class. If I disagree with your son/daughter's assessment of themselves I have indicated so with a square box and my initials.

Key: 1= never, 2 = rarely, 3 = most of the time, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

1) I felt that I was focused and on task throughout this class:

1 2 3 4 5

2) I felt that I was cooperative with my teacher and I did not hinder the learning of my peers:

1 2 3 4 5

3) I felt that I had a positive attitude and I made a good effort in this class:

1 2 3 4 5

Something that I learned about the guitar that I didn't know before: _____

I am especially proud of myself because in guitar class I: _____

I would give myself an overall rating of: (circle one)

U S G E
(unsatisfactory) (satisfactory) (good) (excellent)

Teacher Comments:
