

**TEACHING MUSIC TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS WHO HAVE DIAGNOSED
LEARNING DIFFERENCES: MUSIC TEACHERS' METHODS FOR TEACHING
MUSIC IN A SELF-CONTAINED PROGRAM**

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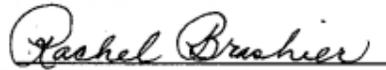
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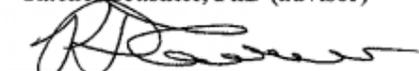
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Abstract

This thesis discusses methods used by music teachers that teach elementary students who have been diagnosed with learning differences in a self-contained program. Background information is provided regarding teaching elementary students with diagnosed learning differences, teaching general music to those students, and finally teaching general music to elementary students who have diagnosed with learning differences and are in a self-contained program. Woltman conducted two in-depth interviews with a music educator who teaches these students in a self-contained program and observed this participant's teaching. This thesis details methods and strategies used by the participant that are successful in engaging students and allow them to remain in class. Findings of the research reveal the importance of using appropriate music teaching strategies for students in self-contained programs, and how knowledge of these strategies has implications for pre-service music teachers, current music teachers, and those who teach music pre-service teachers, school administrators, and the field of music education.

Keywords and phrases: elementary music education, diagnosed learning differences, special education, self-contained program

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the fall of 2010 I was beginning my fifteenth year teaching elementary general music in the public schools of Wisconsin. Two days prior to the start of the school year, my building principal walked into my classroom and said, “A new program is coming to our building. In two days our school will welcome a self-contained program for students who are emotionally and behaviorally disabled. This class is made up of six boys and one girl, ranging in ages seven through eleven years old. They’ll come to you for music twice a week, starting on Thursday.” My principal then asked me if I had any questions. I was stunned by this news, so I replied that I would reach out the next day with my questions. Did I have any questions? Yes, I did. At that moment my mind started spinning as I wondered: How should I go about planning lessons for this class? Can the students read? Do the students have any mental health issues, in addition to their emotional and behavioral disabilities? How do I teach a class like this when there is no curriculum and no guidelines for teaching music to a multi-age group of students in a self-contained program?

Fast forward to 2021: in the midst of a global pandemic, as I began to ponder my thesis topic, I recalled that day in August, over a decade ago. My topic choice became clear. I knew I had to write about teaching general music to elementary students who have diagnosed learning differences, and music teachers’ methods for teaching in a self-contained program.

Purpose

I investigated methods used by music teachers that teach elementary students who have been diagnosed with learning differences in a self-contained program because I wondered what methods help students to be able to stay in class. I wanted to investigate this in order to help the readers to continually learn methods that help students stay in music class. Ultimately, I hope

that my readers will develop more effective methods of teaching that will help them become better teachers and improve their students' experiences in music class.

Importance of Study

The information in this thesis will be valuable to current music teachers who teach students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. This thesis will also be of interest to special education teachers who work alongside music teachers in elementary schools. Others whom this thesis will benefit include: pre-service music teachers, higher education professors, instructors who teach pre-service teachers, cooperating music teachers, music teacher mentors, and administrators in public schools. This thesis could be of consequence for all of these groups of people who are engaged and interested in increasing their understanding of how best to teach music to students with learning differences in a self-contained program.

Definition of Terms

The following are some terms specific to this area of study that may be new to some readers. SEBD is an educational acronym that means social, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. Inclusion is the practice of equal access to resources and opportunities to those who otherwise might be excluded. An IEP is an acronym for an individual education program, and this is a written plan which is designed to meet a child's learning needs. A case manager is the person who is responsible for ensuring a student's special education services are in place, and is usually a special education teacher. A paraprofessional, sometimes referred to as an instructional aide, provides support to students to help make classrooms more inclusive.

In conclusion, in this first chapter of the thesis, I provided information related to the purpose of my study, my research question, the importance of the study, and a definition of fundamental terms. In chapter two, I will provide my review of literature related to this study.

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

In Chapter One I introduced this study about teaching general music to elementary students who have diagnosed learning differences, music teachers' methods for teaching in a self-contained program, and gave some information about my approach to this project. In this chapter, Chapter Two, I will review the literature related to my study of teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. Numerous academics agree that music educators need specific knowledge and approaches when teaching students with diagnosed learning differences (Billingsley et al., 2013). I have organized my review of the literature into the following sections: 1) Teaching Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences, 2) Teaching General Music to Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences, and 3) Teaching General Music to Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences in a Self-Contained Program. In the first section on teaching elementary students with diagnosed learning differences, I will provide information from scholars related to methods for teaching elementary students with diagnosed learning differences (Adamek & Darrow, 2018; Harwell & Jackson, 2014). In the second section on teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences, I will include literature that details strategies for teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences (Hammel, 2004; Jellison et al., 2017). In the third section on teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program, I will discuss scholarship concerning teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program (Sobel, 2017; Weyman, 2004).

Teaching Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences

In this section, I will present information from scholars who study teaching students with diagnosed learning differences (Adamek & Darrow, 2018), and from other scholars about general guidelines for teaching students with learning differences (Billingsley et al., 2013; Shelton & Pollingue, 2009), as well as other scholars who detail strategies for teaching students with specific learning differences (Harwell & Jackson, 2014; Robe, 2004).

Adamek and Darrow (2018), well-known scholars in the area of teaching students with diagnosed learning differences, described the process of teaching thus:

Much progress has been made in the past three decades to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities. Schools have had to undergo complex changes in order to implement the special education laws regarding access and structure of educational services... barriers to educational access may be physical in nature, or they may be unseen elements that impede successful inclusion. It is important for teachers to recognize and understand these possible barriers and to identify possible solutions within their school or classroom (p.45).

Billingsley et al. (2013), recognized special education authors, also observed that, “effective teachers know a lot about their students – not just academically but also who they are as people” (Billingsley et al., 2013). The authors suggested that teachers, “know what is important in their students’ lives and what is what motivates them” (Billingsley, 2013). The authors stated that, “teachers also need to be committed to the learning of all students and work to ensure that students from diverse and culturally different backgrounds have equitable opportunities to learn” (Billingsley, 2013). Shelton and Pollingue (2009) similarly described the need for clearly defined expectations in the classroom. “The establishment of well-defined behavior expectations is essential to maintaining a sense of order in the classroom” (Shelton & Pollingue, 2009).

Robe (2004) additionally stressed the importance of the parents of students who have learning differences. Robe also highlighted the importance of teachers establishing good working relationships with both the students and the students' parents. "For teachers, the key to success is building good working relationships with the child and the child's parents" (Robe, 2004, p. 49). Whereas other education scholars, Harwell and Jackson (2014) espoused that due to the unstable nature of some students' home lives, teachers must strive to create a predictable learning environment. "We never know what the child has experienced at home before coming to school. Start the children off with a simple activity when they come into the classroom for a positive start" (Harwell & Jackson, 2014, pp. 129-130). Teachers must develop positive relationships with parents and be mindful of all aspects of a child's day when working with students who have diagnosed learning differences.

Teaching General Music to Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences

In this second section I will discuss literature regarding strategies for teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences. These include scholars who discuss supporting the unique emotional needs of students with learning differences (Graham & Beer, 1989; Hammel, 2004; Zinar, 1987; McCord, 2004; Siligo, 2004), as well as others who have studied the particular social needs of these students (Hagendorn, 2004; and Jellison et al., 2017). Graham and Beer (1989) determined that when teaching students with learning differences, music teachers must be aware of students' low tolerance for frustration. They suggest that teachers, "learn as much as possible about the students. Try to find the causes of their frustration" (Graham & Beer, 1989, p. 75). Similarly, Hammel (2004) cautioned teachers to avoid power struggles with students in the classroom. Hammel advised, "Avoid power struggles with students. Provide specific instructions and feedback about behavior privately rather than

risk a verbal struggle in front of the class” (Hammel, 2004, p. 36). Addressing an additional area of emotional needs, Zinar (1987) discussed the topic of “release from inhibitions” (p. 27) in terms of how students with learning differences may come into the music classroom locked inside themselves and looking for a safe way to release their emotions. She discusses how this can be achieved through “music dramatization and drawing or painting to music” (Zinar, 1987, p. 27).

Educators McCord (2004) and Siligo (2004) examined the role of assistive technology in supporting students with learning differences and the social-emotional ramifications of using such technology. McCord described how using assistive technology can help students access their strengths while working through challenges associated with their learning differences. “The purpose of assistive technology may include the augmentation of an individual's strengths so that his or her abilities counterbalance the effects of any disabilities” (McCord, 2004, p. 38). Siligo discussed how adaptive technology can be used to address accessibility issues related to students’ participation in music ensembles. “If the music student is a braille music reader, ensemble parts and solos can be transcribed in braille by a certified Braille Music Transcriber” (Siligo, 2004, p. 65).

Other scholars have discussed the social benefits of peer-assisted strategies. Jellison (2017) described children’s natural inclination to help others, and how this propensity to help peers can be leveraged in the classroom. Jellison stated, “Music teachers can nurture children’s prosocial tendencies in a way that will lead to successful music learning outcomes for everyone in the class” (Jellison, 2017, p.16). Hagendorn spoke to the social benefits all children gain when students with diagnosed learning differences learn alongside their neurotypical peers.

Hagendorn recounted, “Goals of inclusion include development of social skills for all school age groups” (Hagendorn, 2004, p. 24).

Teaching General Music to Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences in a Self-Contained Program

In this section, I will present other related literature on teaching music to students in a self-contained program (Ross, 2004; Sobel, 2017), and more specifically scholarship concerning recognizing barriers and modifying instruction to meet the needs of students in a self-contained program, and helping students find their strengths (Blair & McCord, 2016; Adamek & Darrow, 2018; Weyman, 2004; Krebs, 2004). This section specifically discusses literature concerning teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program.

Music teachers must rise to the challenge of welcoming and embracing all their students. Ross (2004) conveyed this call by saying, “In this new millennium, a primary challenge will be the ability to successfully teach all of our students... we must meet this challenge head on” (p.54). Similarly, music educator Elise S. Sobel (2017) stated the importance of educating and supporting students as intact individuals. Sobel said, “When working with students with disabilities, educating the ‘whole’ child takes on a magnified importance” (p. 71). Sobel further asserted that, “each student needs to think of himself or herself as a whole person recognized for his or her abilities” (p. 71).

Blair and McCord (2016) outlined how teachers must change their methods of instruction to meet their students’ needs. “Teachers should be able to promptly modify the mode of interaction so that it enriches the situation and enhances the student’s learning” (Blair & McCord, 2016, p. 2). Beyond methods of instruction, educators Adamek and Darrow called on

teachers to develop an awareness of learning hurdles. “It is important for teachers to recognize and understand these possible barriers and to identify possible solutions within their school or classroom” (Adamek & Darrow, 2018, p. 56).

Weyman (2004) and Krebs (2004) addressed the issue of helping students find their strengths. “What I have found in my own teaching is that these ‘special students’ are often very gifted in something. That something is often found in the arts” (Weyman, 2004, p. 79). Krebs suggested that when planning lessons, teachers begin by including activities that play to students’ strengths. “By virtue of your job as a music teacher, you are quite experienced in working with a variety of students at varying levels of functioning. If at all possible, use a strength area in the first session” (Krebs, 2004, p. 34).

In sum, Chapter Two includes scholarship regarding the methods for teaching elementary students with diagnosed learning differences, as well as strategies for teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences, and also literature about teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. To better understand how to go about teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program, it is important to research methods used by successful veteran music teachers in a self-contained program in order to know more about what methods are most effective in encouraging students to stay in class. That is the focus of the research project. The literature included in this chapter forms the foundation of this research because it helps to better focus the lens on my research question: what are effective methods for teaching general music to elementary students in a self-contained who have been diagnosed with learning differences?

In this chapter, Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature associated with this study devoted to teaching general music to elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. Next, in Chapter Three, I will describe the methodology I used to address my research question and the design of the study as well as the procedures used for analysis.

Chapter III: Design and Methodology

Last chapter, I reviewed the pre existing literature about Teaching Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences, Teaching General Music to Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences, and Teaching General Music to Elementary Students with Diagnosed Learning Differences in a Self-Contained Program. Here, in Chapter Three, I will now explain how I designed this qualitative research project as a case study, and share my method of analysis, using in vivo and emotion coding based on narrative. I have created the following subsections for the ease and understanding of the reader: Process, Participants, Qualitative Research, Data Collection and Analysis. As I noted in Chapter One, the research question driving this study is, “What are effective methods for teaching general music to elementary students in a self-contained program who have been diagnosed with learning differences”?

Process

My process for conducting this research began with trying to understand what methods a successful veteran music teacher in a self-contained program might use and which strategies were most effective in encouraging students to stay in class and participate. I knew I wanted to do a case study analysis of a general music teaching model for elementary students with diagnosed differences in a self-contained program because I wanted to do a ‘deep-dive’ into the strategies that work best for these students. The ‘case’ in this study was one veteran music teacher who is in just such a program. I gathered information using two in-depth interviews with the teacher about her teaching methods for students diagnosed with learning differences in a self-contained program, and observed her teaching.

To begin this study, I reached out via email to a music teaching colleague who has many years' experience teaching students in a self-contained program. The teacher accepted my proposal and signed the Informed Consent form (see Appendix A). I interviewed the participant twice via *Google Meet*, recorded the interviews digitally, and finally transcribed each of these recordings for analysis. I observed the teacher teaching a thirty minute class in her classroom one time. I recorded my observations in a handwritten journal (see Appendix E). After the first interview, and again after the observation, I emailed the teacher and asked follow-up questions. I transcribed the observations for analysis, and also included the text of her email responses in my analysis. In order to account for validity and reliability, I also sent the summary of my analysis back to the participant for member-checking as well as to two other music educators for peer review and input.

Participants

My participant was selected using purposeful sampling. Because I was trying to understand music teaching methods for students diagnosed with learning differences in a self-contained program, I used this type of sampling typical for case studies and qualitative research (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Purposeful sampling allowed me to explore a data-rich case that contained valuable information regarding issues crucial to the research in depth. In order to help answer questions about music teaching methods for students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program, I needed a participant who was a music teacher, and in addition, that teacher needed to teach students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. I initially tried to find three participants. After making phone calls and sending emails to both elementary music teachers across the state of Wisconsin, as well as to administrators of various school districts, it became clear that very few school

districts, it became clear that very few school districts have a self-contained class of students with diagnosed learning differences who attended music class with a trained music teacher. I had trouble finding people that met that criteria. After additional emailing and calling elementary general music teachers from around the state, I was able to locate two educators who taught music to students in a self-contained program. Of those two individuals, one was willing to participate in my research. This participant is a female elementary general music teacher who is in her 30th year of teaching. She is the full-time music teacher at a school of approximately 500 students, in a suburban school district made up of around 14,000 students. The self-contained students are a class of ten students, all boys, ranging from age 7 to age 11. The participant has both a bachelor's degree and a Master's degree in Music Education.

I selected this one (1) highly-regarded teacher. I reached out to this teacher again via email. After the teacher received an Informed Consent form (see Appendix A) she consented to being interviewed. It should be noted that the participant was female. While there are male teachers that I am sure fit my criteria, my participant happens to be female.

Qualitative Research

This study utilizes Qualitative Research. Qualitative research focuses mainly on gathering data from lived experiences (Cresswell, 2014). By using qualitative research, I was able to collect data regarding music teaching methods for students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. My qualitative research is case study, which means that my research approach is intended to generate a deep comprehension of a complex issue in a real-life setting (Cresswell, 2014). Case studies are not necessarily generalizable, but conducting a qualitative study allowed me to focus on gathering data towards gaining a comprehensive

understanding of a teaching and learning practice from a narrow sample size. In order to triangulate the sources of my data, I collected data through in-depth interviews, observation, and follow-up email correspondence.

Data Collection

My research process required me to select one highly regarded teacher who instructs students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. I reached out to this teacher via email. After the teacher received an Informed Consent form, she consented to being interviewed. I interviewed the teacher twice, via *Google Meet*. I recorded and transcribed both *Google Meet* interviews. I observed the teacher teaching one twenty minute music class to students with diagnosed learning differences. I recorded my observations in a handwritten journal (see Appendix E). I emailed the participant and asked for a written email response once. I transcribed and anonymized the interviews, and typed up my written observation notes and email response for analysis, before destroying the video recordings and original email with identifiers to protect the identity of the participant.

Analysis of the Data

My data analysis plan included narrative analysis, *in vivo* coding and emotion coding (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). To assist me in my analysis, I utilized the software *MAXQDA* in order to sort and code data from interviews, observation notes, and email response. First, I took the data from the interview transcriptions, the typed-up written observation notes, and email responses and I coded the data using *in vivo* coding. That is, I read through the data carefully, line-by-line, and assigned codes based on key words and phrases the participant chose. Next, I re-coded the same data using emotion coding. Emotion coding labels the emotions

recalled or experienced by the participant. In this round of coding, I again read through the data carefully, line-by-line, and highlighted words that are related to emotion. I then did a count to see which emotion words were repeated or figured prominently. Finally, I conducted a narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a type of qualitative data analysis where content is gathered from personal interviews and field observation in order to try to tell the story of the participant. In this last round of coding, I re-read the data more holistically, and considered information in terms of larger chunks or concepts, to diagram the story that the participant was trying to tell.

Moreover, in this chapter, Chapter Three, I described how I designed this research project. I explained each step of my process and shared my method of analysis. In Chapter Four, I will report on the results of my findings.

Chapter IV: Findings from Participant Interviews, Observation, and Email Exchange

In the previous three chapters I introduced this study about successful strategies for teaching music to students in a self-contained program, included a review of literature related to the study, and gave a description of the methodology and my approach to analysis. Here, in Chapter Four, I will report the findings from the data. As described in Chapter Three, I collected data for this case study through interview, observation, and email exchange. I analyzed this data qualitatively using *in vivo* coding, emotion coding, and narrative analysis. The results of this data collection are as follows.

In Vivo Coding: First Level of Analysis

In the first round of coding I used the software *MAXQDA* in order to sort and code data from interviews, observation notes, and email response. Coding the data using *in vivo* coding, I created a code system with the following twelve color-codes: successful strategies (yellow), planning for and teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences (blue), students' challenges and deficits (red), music teacher goes to students (lavender), elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program (turquoise), teacher's experience (light green), teaching elementary general music (dark yellow), traveling music teacher (pink), forever (brown), job (purple), students like music (green), and teaching music (orange).

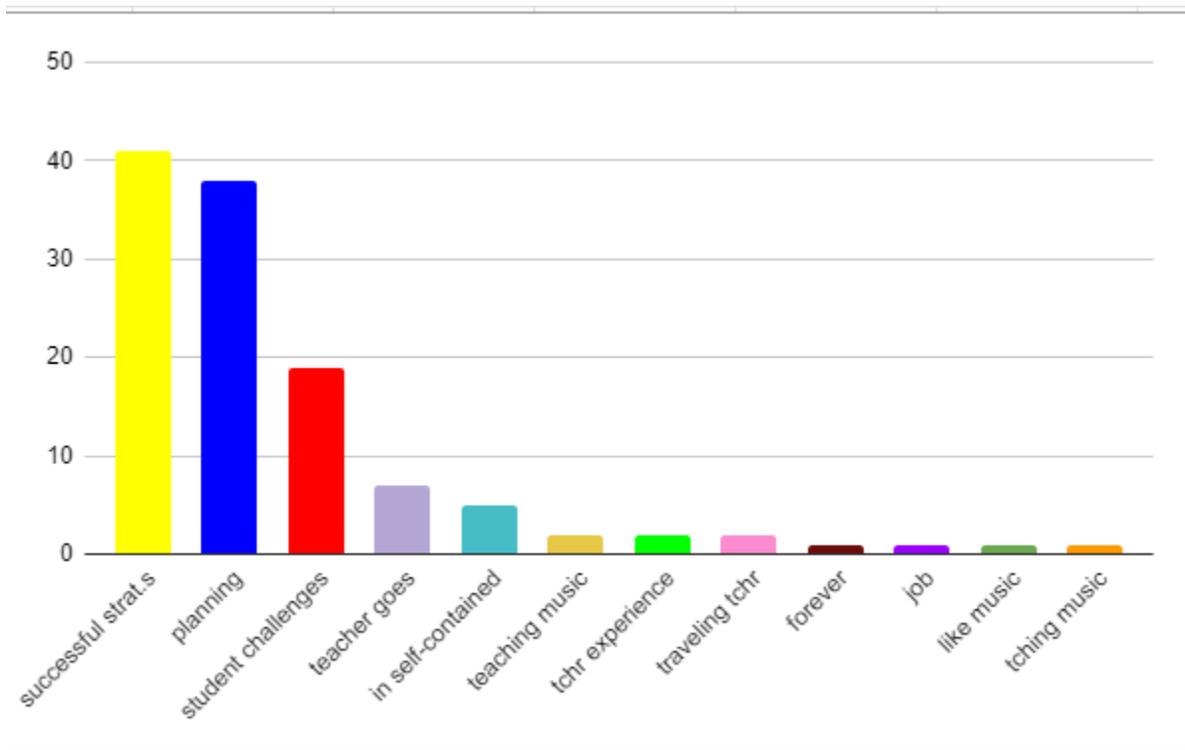
I counted how many times each code appeared across all the data: successful strategies (yellow): forty-one times, planning for and teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences (blue): thirty-eight times, students' challenges and deficits (red): nineteen times, music teacher goes to students (lavender): seven times, elementary students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program (turquoise): five times, teacher's experience

(light green): two times, teaching elementary general music (dark yellow): two times, traveling music teacher (pink): two times, forever (brown): one time, job (purple): one time, students like music (green): one time, and teaching music (orange): one time.

There were two key terms (successful strategy, and planning for and teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences) that each appeared in three out of four data collections: two interviews, one observation, and one (1) email exchange. Additionally, there was one key term (students' challenges and deficits) that appeared in all four data collections. Successful strategies were referenced thirty-four (34) times in the first interview, four (4) times in the second interview, and three (3) times in the observation. The participant referred to planning for and teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences thirty-four (34) times in the first interview, two (2) times in the second interview, and two (2) times in the email exchange. Mentions of students' challenges and deficits occurred twelve (12) times in the first interview, two (2) times in the second interview, one (1) time in the observation, and four (4) times in the email exchange. Therefore, the three most significant terms and phrases from this first round of coding were: successful strategy, planning for and teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences, and students' challenges and deficits.

Table 1

Frequency of usage for a specific word or phrase, using *in vivo* coding



Emotion Coding: Second Level of Analysis

In the second level of analysis, I again used the software *MAXQDA* in order to sort and code data from interviews, observation notes, and an email response. However, this time, I coded the data using emotion coding, and created a code system with the following seven color-codes: excited (amethyst), confident in a strongly held belief (magenta), frustrated (black), hopeful (fuschia), happy (periwinkle), uncertain (violet), and sad (carnation).

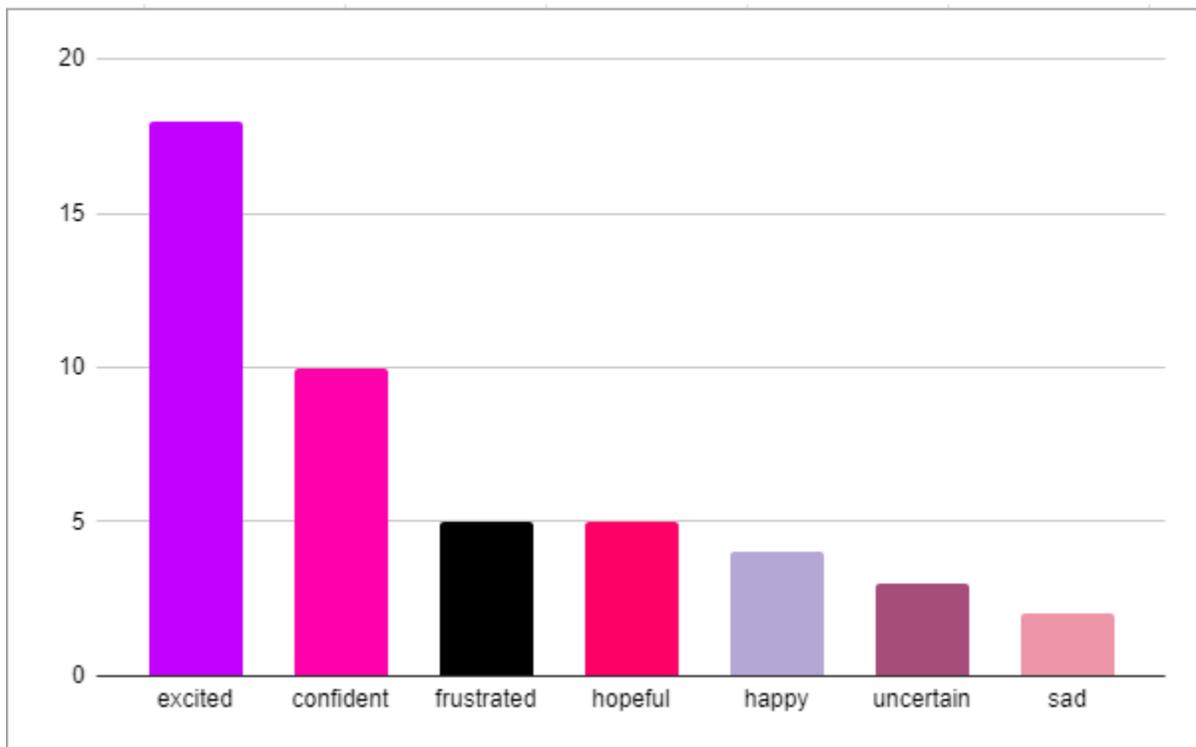
I counted how many times each code appeared across all the data: excited (amethyst), eighteen times, confident in a strongly held belief (magenta): ten times, frustrated (black): five

times, hopeful (fuschia): five times, happy (periwinkle): four times, uncertain (violet): three times, and sad (carnation): two times.

There were two key emotion words that each appeared in three out of four data collections: two interviews, one observation, and one email exchange. Excited was an emotion word that preponderated the data, appearing eighteen (18) times across all data collection. Another emotion that figured prominently was the participant feeling confident in a strongly held belief, which appeared ten (10) times across three data collections. Additionally, two (2) emotion words that emerged from that data with some significance were frustrated and hopeful. Both frustrated and hopeful occurred five (5) times each, across two types of data: the interview and the email exchange. To summarize, the four most significant emotion words from this second round of coding were: excited, confident, frustrated, and hopeful.

Table 2

Frequency of occurrence for emotions: using emotive coding



Narrative: Third Level of Analysis

In the final level of analysis, I conducted a narrative analysis: I gathered content from interviews, observation, and email exchange. I re-read the data more comprehensively and pondered information in terms of larger concepts, in order to illuminate the story the participant was trying to tell. The story the participant was trying to share was a three-fold ‘testament’ or guidebook for what a music teacher needs to do to help students with diagnosed learning

differences have a successful music class experience. Her first tenet was that teachers must use successful strategies to engage students. A case in point was a lesson that featured a play-along video that was projected on a ViewSonic board. Students played rhythm patterns using rhythm sticks and alternatively shaker eggs, as indicated by picture guides on the screen. The second tenet was that teachers should be aware of their students' deficits. For example, teachers should avoid reading based activities due to below-grade level reading skills of students. The third and final tenet of her guidebook was that both successful strategies and knowledge of students' deficits are key factors that teachers must always be mindful of when planning instruction and teaching. The participant described this process as such, "I've learned to try to avoid any potential frustration and having to read is a potential frustration...I try to have a blend of sit and listen, and listen and do something".

As a part of the narrative analysis, I used MAXQDA to generate a word cloud. Here is what I found. The following words are of key importance: think, do, and music. The basic embodiment of a successful music class must be to 'think' and 'do' music in accessible ways. Additionally, the word 'with' is significant because the music teacher must not plan instruction in a vacuum. The teacher needs to plan and carry out instruction, making necessary adjustments as he or she is with the students.

of the COVID pandemic helped her discover new strategies to use with students. She said, “I leaned in on technology more this year...they respond very well to that. And there are so many great resources online that will engage them right away, get them involved”.

Another successful strategy is engaging students in music activities that they are highly motivated to participate in. The participant described this, saying, “They love instruments and I’ve had a lot of luck with the boomwhackers because they’re indestructible, but they still feel like an instrument”. She further describes how using these instruments helped empower students to make safe choices: “It’s something different and they can tap it on their desk or they have choices within that...you can give them controlled choices where they feel like they’ve got some control over the situation”.

Second finding: Cognizance of Students’ Challenges

The second vital finding is that teachers must be cognizant of students’ challenges and deficits in order to support students’ success in music class. The participant described both observing the students and talking with Special Education teachers prior to creating music lesson plans. Once these steps were taken, the participant understood that in her school setting, her students would be best served by having music class take place in the self-contained classroom. The participant described the benefits of doing so: “Fewer distractions, probably first and foremost...transitions aren’t their strong suit. And number two, there’s so much stimulus in my room”. The participant further detailed: “When I go into their room, they already know where their seats are. They know where they can go if it’s not working...plus, if it’s not going well, then I leave instead of them having to get pulled out”.

Another key area of awareness of students' deficits is related to avoiding things that may invoke frustration. The participant said that although, "...we did a lot of singing in my other classes, but a second grader can't read the same or sometimes at all the same amount that a fifth or sixth grader could read... There's only so many songs you can sing by rote. And they didn't always love singing". She explained further that in a multi-age, self-contained program reading can be a trigger that leads to students feeling frustrated. Students often feel, "frustration if asked to do something they find difficult".

Third finding: Planning for and Teaching Music

The third key finding is that both successful strategies and knowledge of students' challenges and deficits are key factors when planning for and teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences. This planning and teaching is a constantly evolving process that involves frequent reflection on the part of the educator. The participant detailed the planning of instruction: "They love anything graphic and visual... They liked the play-alongs...it has to be really simple...something that they both can be successful at but don't get bored with. Not too challenging, but still engaging". The participant further described a successful music class as one where, "I can get them writing on a whiteboard, or I can get them playing a boomwhacker, or something that's just a little bit of movement in their safe space".

The pacing of class activities, as well as consideration for type of activity and level of difficulty must be carefully considered. The participant said she has had success with, "One five-minute listening thing, one five-minute instrument thing, one five minute read the rhythm, clap the rhythm...Not too challenging, but still engaging. That's the trick".

Conclusion paragraph

In this chapter, I discussed my findings from participant interviews, observation, and email exchange. In the first round of coding I used the software *MAXQDA* in order to sort and code data from interviews, observation notes, and email response. Coding the data using *in vivo* coding, I created a code system with the following twelve color-codes. In the second level of analysis, I again used the software *MAXQDA* in order to sort and code data from interviews, observation notes, and an email response. However, this time, I coded the data using emotion coding, and created a code system with the following seven color-codes. In the final level of analysis, I conducted a narrative analysis: I gathered content from interviews, observation, and email exchange. I re-read the data more comprehensively and pondered information in terms of larger concepts, in order to illuminate the story the participant was trying to tell. The first significant finding is that utilizing successful strategies is of utmost importance when teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program. The second vital finding is that teachers must be cognizant of students' challenges and deficits in order to support students' success in music class. The third key finding is that both successful strategies and knowledge of students' challenges and deficits are key factors when planning for and teaching music to students with diagnosed learning differences. Of key importance is that when I coded for emotion coding, the codes that represented feeling excited (amethyst), and feeling confident in a strongly held belief (magenta) were very significant. The emotion of being excited appeared across all datasets eighteen (18) times, and the emotion of feeling confident in a

strongly held belief appeared ten (10) times across three (3) data collections. As shown by the data, the participant felt excited and confident that the students can have successful music classes. She stated, “I feel like, ‘Okay, now I get it’... I know how to plan, and it works...The percentage of times where I’d come out of there feeling like, ‘Hey, that went okay’ is more”. The participant felt that her combined knowledge and use of successful strategies, along with an awareness of students’ challenges and deficits, informed appropriate planning for and teaching music for students in a self-contained program. In the next chapter, Discussion and Implications, I will discuss implications for others, implications for the field of music education, and implications for future research.

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

In the previous four chapters I introduced this study about successful strategies for teaching music to students in a self-contained program, included a review of literature related to the study, gave a description of the methodology and reported the findings from the data. As described earlier, I collected data for this case study through interview, observation, and email exchange. I analyzed this data qualitatively using *in vivo* coding, emotion coding, and narrative analysis. In this chapter, I will present a discussion of my findings and implications for music educators, school administrators, the field of music education, and future researchers.

1st Theme: Successful Strategies

A significant successful strategy is engaging students in a variety of activities that are not too long in duration. The participant recommended: “Keep the activities short...and varied.” A second successful strategy is the teacher’s ability to assess and be able to ‘take the pulse’ of the class as a whole. The participant describes this internal thought process thusly: “Okay, that was good. Now let’s try this. Now let’s try - oh, this isn’t working. No, let’s do this”. A teacher’s ability to continually evaluate students’ actions and reactions during class is key to successful music instruction.

I follow the same ideology as the participant: keep music class activities short in duration and varied in type. For the first two months of the school year, for each thirty-minute class I plan three activities. I start class with an instrument play-along activity, where students play a hand-held percussion instrument and play rhythms shown on a *ViewSonic* board while a song

plays. The combination of visually appealing graphics, the use of a simple instrument such as an egg shaker, and upbeat music all work together to encourage student engagement. After the play-along, I have students play a game. I will further describe the use of small groups, and simple games that focus on taking turns in the '2nd Theme' that follows. After the game, I bring the students back together to watch a short music-related video.

Throughout the class, the teacher must continually monitor and assess the 'pulse' of the group as a whole. If more than one student is struggling to successfully engage in an activity, it may be time to stop and move on to the next activity. I always plan three activities per class session, and also have two additional activities as 'back-ups', in case I need to abandon something. The teacher must be willing and able to switch gears quickly. Never try to push through and continue with an activity where students' emotions are escalating. Having a couple extra items planned is essential due to the often unpredictable nature of the students.

An additional successful strategy that I rely on is the elimination of distractions and the removal of items that could be hazardous. Before my students who are in the self-contained program enter the music room, I scan the room for possible distractions. I put away or cover up items that we will not be using in class. I purchased several inexpensive cloth shower curtains and bedsheets that I can use to quickly cover carts of instruments. 'Out of sight, out of mind' is my guiding principle. I also put away objects that students could use in a manner that would be unsafe toward themselves or others. Examples of items I do not keep out in the music room are: stapler, scissors, drumsticks, and large drums. I keep all of these items locked in cupboards or desk drawers.

2nd Theme: Awareness of Students' Challenges and Deficits

Although my students range in age from age seven through age twelve, they all have deficits not only in academic skills, like reading and math, but even more importantly they have deficits in social and emotional skills. I learned early on in my first years teaching the students in the self-contained classroom that the main goals of start-of-year activities must focus on direct instruction on turn-taking, and how to handle the emotion of frustration (such as when a student loses a game). Games are the ideal vehicle for teaching concepts that are challenging for students, because the students are typically highly motivated to play games. Therefore, while they are having fun playing a game, they are also learning social skills. Teachers must avoid overly challenging tasks that may trigger frustration in the students. When selecting games to play, I choose simple games that do not involve any reading skills. When choosing instruments for class, I select instruments that are both easy to play and that are sturdy enough for beginners who are learning how to play safely. The participant in this study describes why Boomwhackers are an excellent choice for students in a self-contained program. Boomwhackers are colorful plastic tubes, cut to varying lengths so they resonate at different pitches. As my informant puts it, "They love instruments and I've had a lot of luck with the Boomwhackers, because they're indestructible, but they still feel like an instrument." Additional instruments that students have success playing are egg shakers, rhythm sticks, and resonator bells.

Turn-taking is a concept that most seven-year-olds understand. However, the idea of taking turns while playing a game is something that, without exception, my students in the self-contained class struggle to do successfully. During the months of September and October, I spend half of each class period engaging students in simple games, so I can directly instruct and

demonstrate how to take turns. One game I've modified for music class is the classic children's game, 'Don't Break the Ice'. Using a permanent marker, I drew a music note on each ice block: a quarter note, a pair of eighth notes, a half note, and a quarter rest. I have four game sets so that no more than three students play together. Students in the self-contained program tend to have greater success practicing turn-taking when they are in a small group.

Students in the self-contained classroom also need modeling to help them learn how to handle the emotion of frustration. I created a music version of the game, 'Memory.' This game involves taking turns flipping over picture cards that are placed face down on a table or on the floor. The goal of the game is for each player to find as many pairs as possible. It is a simple game that involves no reading and is easy to play. When playing this game recently with my students, one student became very frustrated when he was not able to successfully match many pairs of cards. Another student attempted to offer encouragement to his classmate. This kind of empathetic action is exactly what I am trying to give students the opportunity to practice.

3rd Theme: Planning For and Teaching Music to Students With Diagnosed Learning Differences

In chapter four, I discussed the importance of teachers being aware of their students' challenges in order to best create an environment where students can have a successful music class experience. Factors such as eliminating distractions and avoiding overly challenging tasks that may trigger students' frustration are paramount. An additional theme that is relevant to this discussion is the music teacher's relationship with the special education teachers in the self-contained classroom, and how the teachers all work together to support students' music instruction. When conducting the second level of analysis, emotive coding, two (2) emotion words that emerged from that data with some significance were frustrated and hopeful. These

emotions of feeling frustrated and hopeful centered on the participant's description of the challenges a music teacher faces when navigating instruction times that occur with students in a self-contained program.

Due to the very nature of educational and emotional needs the students in a self-contained program have, extreme and sometimes volatile actions occur. During these times, flexibility must prevail. At the start of the school year, it is beneficial for the music teacher to initiate discussions with the special education teachers regarding how to handle the 'rough days'. I have had the opportunity to work with extraordinary special education teachers who understand that just because the schedule says it's time for music, they realize that some students may not be in a state when they are ready for music instruction on a given day. The participant voiced her frustration when communication among teachers does not occur. She described a situation where she entered the self-contained classroom for music instruction and students were engaging in unsafe behaviors. She saw students, "...swearing, and brawling, and throwing - and it's like, 'Why am I here? Why are we trying to force this music just because it says on a piece of paper that they're supposed to get this music today?' And that's not good for anyone."

I, too, have experienced situations where I needed to end music instruction because students clearly were not able to learn due to being in an unregulated emotional state. In these instances, I communicated with the special education teachers I work with that my concerns for the safety of all necessitated my ending the music instruction for that particular day. I have virtual music lessons that I share electronically with special educators who can allow the students to engage in music activities when they are calm. I believe that music educators are in the business of teaching children because in our hearts we want to share the beauty and the power that is inherent in music. Sometimes our strong desire to share music may inadvertently open the

door to pushing ourselves to stay in unsafe situations. Music instruction for students in self-contained classrooms works best when all educators are engaged in ongoing conversations about how to provide instruction in an environment that is safe for students and teachers alike. The participant described feeling hopeful at the prospect of starting the school year and having conversations with special education staff: “I think the advice I would give somebody is to try to work with those teachers as much as possible to kind of have a team plan.” No music teacher should feel guilty about removing herself from an environment in order to protect her physical well-being. Creating a plan for how to handle music instruction, and if necessary how to end instruction, during those difficult times is essential.

Implications

Implications for Others

A compelling implication of this research and its findings for music teachers, as well as special education teachers, is that when planning instruction for students with diagnosed learning differences, one must be cognisant of students’ challenges and deficits, while utilizing strategies that have shown to support student success. Teacher planning must focus on hands-on activities where students are actively engaged. Teachers should guide students through activities with simple directions and clear expectations. This framework will assist students in self-regulation, which will allow them to stay in class.

Elementary school principals and other administrators can support music teachers and special education teachers in planning hands-on instruction by generously funding the purchases of classroom percussion instruments. The prospect of playing a drum or a xylophone is an exciting and highly motivating one for students. This motivation also plays a role in self-regulation for students, especially those with diagnosed learning differences. Students want

to play these instruments, so they strive to grow in the self-regulation process. These positive behavior choices give students opportunities to build skills and gain confidence in both the music classroom and build important life skills.

Implications for the Field of Music Education

A significant implication for the field of music education is that students with diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program can achieve success in music class. A successful music class for a student who has been diagnosed with learning differences is usually defined as one where the student is able to participate, self-regulate, and therefore remain in class. Too often, such students are written off as having too many challenges to participate in a music class. This should not be. My research shows that with appropriate planning by the music teacher, students who have been diagnosed with even very pronounced learning differences can indeed have a successful and positive music class experience and, of course, have a right to a music education.

The first guideline for teaching students with diagnosed learning differences is to know and prepare your teaching space before students enter the room, ask yourself the following question: where will students sit? Next, look around the room and remove any items that may be potentially dangerous or distracting. Put away scissors and staplers. Cover any large instruments like drums with an old bedsheet. “Out of sight, out of mind” is a good guiding principle to follow when preparing the space for students.

The second guideline is to know your students’ strengths and weaknesses. If you know your students struggle with transitions, clearly explain each activity and give concise instructions. Set your students up for success. The third guideline is to be ever-flexible in your teaching. When planning a lesson, create a detailed plan containing three or four activities. Additionally, plan two

activities to keep in reserve as a backup plan. You must continually assess and evaluate the students, and be willing to make adjustments and changes in what and how you teach based on students' responses.

Implications for Future Research

My research has shown that one of the most successful methods of music teaching that helps students with diagnosed learning differences stay in music class involves students playing an instrument in a low-risk/high-reward environment. In my future research, I plan to study additional music class activities involving instrument playing that are low-risk/high-reward, and that can be scaffolded to accommodate students' individual strengths and areas in need of future growth.

Early in my teaching career I thought, 'music for all' was a pie-in-the-sky ideal that was strictly hyperbole. After more than twenty-six years of teaching elementary general music in the public school system, I understand that, 'music for all' is indeed my daily mantra. I am a human, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, a friend and a teacher. I consider teaching music to children to be my calling and my privilege. I have two sons, one of whom has diagnosed learning differences. This young man has music in his heart and has since the moment he was born. I tirelessly fought for his right to learn with his peers. The teachers who come alongside him, meeting him where he is, and embracing him for who he is, will have a place in my heart forever. A child knows how he is different from his peers. I strive daily to have the music classroom be a place where no one is identified as 'other' and therefore excluded. The frequently quoted idea of another door opening when one door closes is a sentiment that does not ring true for many

children with diagnosed learning differences. In my fifteen years as a parent of a son with such differences I have learned that looking and waiting for that silver lining does not suffice. One must passionately and continuously shine a light on the child's many amazing qualities, and when one door closes it's time to pick up the tools and build your own door. My call to educators, parents and children is reflected in the lyrics of the Rascal Flatts (2006) song, *My*

Wish:

I hope the days come easy and the moments pass slow. And each road leads you where you want to go. And if you're faced with a choice and you have to choose, I hope you choose the one that means the most to you. And if one door opens to another door closed, I hope you keep on walkin' 'till you find the window. If it's cold outside, show the world the warmth of your smile. But more than anything, more than anything, my wish for you is that this life becomes all that you want it to. Your dreams stay big, your worries stay small. You never need to carry more than you can hold. And while you're out there getting where you're getting to, I hope you know somebody loves you, and wants the same things too. Yeah, this is my wish.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subjects Research

Dr. Rachel Brashier, professor of Music Education at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, would appreciate your participation in a research study designed to investigate successful strategies for teaching elementary general music to students who have diagnosed learning differences and are in a self-contained program. You are being asked to participate in two short interviews that should take up no more than 60 minutes each. You are also being asked to allow a 30-minute observation of your teaching, and submitting your written response to five questions via email. All described actions will take place over a six-month period. Your participation is completely voluntary. The benefit of this study is a greater knowledge about successful music teaching strategies for students who have diagnosed learning differences and are in a self-contained program. We anticipate no risk to you as a result of your participation in this study other than the inconvenience of the time to complete the survey. You could, however, experience some mild sadness while recalling challenges students faced in school.

It is hoped that we may gain valuable information about successful teaching strategies for students who have diagnosed learning differences, and that will be of future value to both students and educators. While this information could be obtained by several lengthy surveys, we feel that interviews and observation are the simplest and most thorough methods for obtaining this information. You may also choose not to participate as an alternative.

The information that you give us in the interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the office of Dr. Rachel Brashier and will not be available to anyone not directly involved in this study. I will obtain your written permission prior to using your name in publication of results. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you want to withdraw from the study, at any time, you may do so without penalty or loss of benefit entitled. After research is complete and results are reported, I will destroy all primary data. Once the study is completed, you may receive the results of the study. If you would like these results, or if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact:

Dr. Rachel Brashier, School of Music Education
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
2100 Main St.
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-2227
rbrashie@uwsp.edu

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study or believe that you have been harmed in some way by your participation, please call or write:

David Barry, PhD, IRB Chair, Associate Professor, Sociology
Old Main 208
University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point and Extension
Stevens Point, WI 54481
715.346.3799
irb@uwsp.edu

Although Dr. Barry will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

I have read and understand the information provided to me; that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

Jennifer Griffith

Printed name of participant

Jennifer Griffith

Signature of participant

8/10/21

Date

Appendix B: Signed Letter of Administrative Approval/Permission from Off-site Location



Steve J. Harrison
Assistant Superintendent - Assessment, Curriculum & Instruction
120 E. Harris St. • P.O. Box 2019 • Appleton, WI 54911
(920) 832-6157 ext. 2177 FAX (920) 832-6359

July 19, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves as approval for the field study research proposal submitted by Laura Woltman in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. It is hereby understood that research will be conducted in 5K-6 classrooms within the Appleton Area School District. The focus of the research will be successful strategies for teaching music to elementary students who have diagnosed learning differences. Further, the proposed research study is approved within the following memorandum of understanding:

- No students in the Appleton Area School District shall be identified within the research study.
- Any video or digital recordings of students shall not take place without assurance that parent permission has been properly secured.
- No staff members within the Appleton Area School District shall be identified within the research study.
- All District guidelines with respect to academic and behavioral data shall be followed without exception.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve J. Harrison".

Steve J. Harrison

Appendix C: Email to Approach Participant

Greetings fellow music educator,

As you may or may not know, I am in the final stages of completing my Master's Degree in Music Education at UW-Stevens Point. As part of the degree program, I will be conducting a study on successful strategies for teaching music to elementary students who have diagnosed learning differences. As part of my research, I would like to interview an AASD elementary general music teacher: two 60-minute interviews via Google Meet. I also would like to observe an elementary general music teacher for one 30-minute class. Would you be interested in volunteering?

Each interview contains five questions relating to your experiences in music education. All interviews will be conducted via Google Meet and will not exceed one hour in time. If you would like to volunteer to participate in this study, please reply to this email stating your interest. We will work out times and dates that work best with your schedule.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Laura (Laurie) Woltman

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Interviews Conducted by Laurie Woltman

Questions for interview #1:

What is your teaching position, and how long have you been teaching elementary general music?

How long have you been teaching elementary general music to students who have diagnosed learning differences and are in a self-contained program?

How many students are in a typical music class when you teach students who have diagnosed learning differences and are in a self-contained program?

When you first began teaching students who have diagnosed learning differences and are in a self-contained program, how did you plan instruction?

What do you wish you had known when you first began teaching students who have diagnosed learning differences and are in a self-contained program?

Questions for interview #2:

How, if at all, does your teaching differ now as compared to when you first began teaching students who have diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program?

How do you determine successful teaching strategies for students who have diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program?

What are strategies that you have found to be ineffective when teaching students who have diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program?

How, if at all, do you adjust your teaching strategies during a class period?

What types of class activities have you found to be successful when teaching students who have diagnosed learning differences in a self-contained program?

Appendix E: Observation Checklist

Laurie Woltman- Checklist for observation

Lesson plan outline and timing:

Types of activities:

PLAYING INSTRUMENTS

_____ classroom percussion instruments (i.e. rhythm sticks, maracas, triangle)

_____ bell sets

_____ Orff instruments

_____ Boomwhackers

_____ other

GAMES

Describe game(s) played:

VIDEOS

Describe video(s) watched:

SONGS

List

OTHER TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

Describe:

