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MUSIC AT THE MIDDLE: PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE MIDDLE LEVEL GENERAL  
MUSIC TEACHERS

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

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## ABSTRACT

This mixed methods inquiry examined the principles teachers employ when teaching middle level general music to young adolescents in the United States. In the discourse of music education, general music is often described as comprehensive music education for all students. In the language of middle level education, general music is classified as one of several “exploratory” course offerings designed to broaden young adolescent perspectives and knowledge about the world. If a simple definition of the term general music differs between the disciplines, how do music teachers working in middle schools negotiate these disciplinary boundaries? Upon what experiential influences do music teachers draw when developing middle level general music courses? Drawing on the principles of the middle level concept, particularly those articulated in *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, this interdisciplinary study investigated the principles guiding the practices of middle level general music teachers.

Using an iterative integrated mixed methods design, this inquiry was conducted in two phases: a national survey of 1,369 middle school music teacher respondents and narratives of experience of four music teachers. Both phases sought to understand the principles that guide music teachers as they design, develop, and implement their curriculum and pedagogy in middle level general music. In addition, the impact of six aspects of teachers’ lived experiences (preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement) on the choices made when teaching middle school general music were investigated. The survey phase found that while music teacher respondents were overwhelmingly unaware of *This We Believe*, these teachers often make curricular and pedagogical decisions in alignment with some principles of the middle level concept. This phase also revealed that teaching experience most influenced the decisions survey

respondents made regarding their general music courses. In the second phase, stories of four teachers negotiating the ongoing dynamics of students, administration, content, and philosophical beliefs as they teach middle school general music were developed.

In addition, a mixed methods analysis was conducted, integrating all forms of data collected. From this final mixed methods analysis, three dialectics emerged and were discussed using data from both phases of the inquiry. These dialectics represent three continuums of tension that challenge music teachers in the teaching of general music to young adolescents. These three tensions are: 1) the curricular emphasis on making and receiving of music, 2) teachers' understanding of middle school students as children and emerging adults, 3) teachers' perceptions of their general music classroom as contested spaces and home places.

Two implications arise from this inquiry. First, local circumstances are more germane to decisions teachers make than any universal set of principles regarding middle level general music. Second, there is a need for deeper communication between the fields of middle level education and music education in order to assist middle level music educators in negotiating daily challenges. Further research is needed to address the needs and experiences of a broader population of music educators, specifically, to investigate the influence of preservice preparation, music teacher expertise, and inservice education on the teaching of middle school general music, and develop beneficial resources for practitioners. More perspectives on the issues related to general music that surfaced during this study are important to both confirm and further complicate current understandings of middle level general music.

**Keywords:** General music, middle school music teachers, middle grades, middle level, middle level concept, *This We Believe*, democratic education, mixed methods



*My professional life is staked on the claim that music is good for middle school students; it can help them cope with the myriad difficulties that confront kids at this age, and it can be a source of comfort throughout their lives. It can become an area of interest they didn't know they had, and may even provide direction for their future. It can help them see and understand their world in new ways. In addition, it is my belief that middle school general music represents our last, best hope for convincing adolescents that they can be musical. For many, this will be the last music class they are required to take, and so it will be our last opportunity to provide sequential instruction to the entire student body. (McAnally, 2009, p. vii)*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not be possible without a number of people who have supported, encouraged, and participated in my work throughout this process. First, I offer my sincerest thanks to my doctoral advisor, Dr. Liora Bresler, who has encouraged me as a student, scholar, and researcher throughout my graduate career. Her wisdom guided me on the path that led to this study and I am forever grateful. Second, I offer my heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Jeananne Nichols, who guided this project, critiqued my work, and challenged me in so many ways. Without her sound judgment, sense of humor, and continual willingness to read drafts, I am certain this project would not be complete.

I also wish to thank my doctoral committee, Dr. Jennifer Greene, Dr. Janet R. Barrett, and Dr. Marilyn Parsons for their encouragement, support, and knowledge. This project has roots in courses taken with each committee member and their influence and expertise were invaluable to the inception and implementation of this interdisciplinary study. In particular, Dr. Greene read and critiqued the survey analysis on several occasions, and it is her concept of mixed methods dialectic analysis that inspired the mixed methods analysis I employed herein.

In addition, I offer my sincere appreciation to scholars who provided feedback as I developed the survey instrument and conducted the quantitative analysis: Dr. Courtney Blackwell, Dr. Louis Bergonzi, Dr. Katherine Ryan, fellow students in EPSY 590 in the spring of 2014, and Jennifer Timmer.

I would most like to thank all of the music teachers who gave their time to contribute to data collection, whether through completion of the survey, or through more in-depth participation. In particular, this work would not be possible without the willingness and generosity of Beth, Michael, Rachel, and Sarah, who allowed me into their classrooms, patiently

answered innumerable questions about their practice, their students, and their school, and critiqued drafts of their narratives. I would especially like to thank their administrators for allowing my research visits and their colleagues for allowing me to listen and observe during my time at their schools.

This doctoral process would not be possible without the unfailing support of my family and friends. Thanks in particular to Jennifer Cronenberg for her continual contributions of commas and other grammatical corrections to my work, and to Mark Keitges for his love and support throughout this often intense and consuming process.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Throughout my doctoral studies, I taught at a small (one class per grade), private all-girls school. The 2014-2015 school year—the school year during which data was collected for this study—was my fourth at this school. At my school, all students take general music (known by the students as “music class”) for all three middle level years (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>).

At the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, my 8<sup>th</sup> grade students told me that they wanted to learn more about musical instruments. Specifically, they wanted to know more about the percussion instruments at the back of the orchestra and how instruments produced sound. From this discussion on our first day of class, I set about designing a sequence of units to help them understand more about instruments about which they might not be familiar. Several units and projects resulted from this discussion, the most prominent of which was the construction of ukuleles.

Working collaboratively with the visual art teacher and the applied arts (sewing) teacher, the girls and I began building ukuleles from kits. The visual arts teacher and I taught collaboratively as we worked through the construction steps necessary to create ukuleles that accurately produced sound. When we painted the ukuleles, I worked alongside the girls, asking the visual art teacher questions, as I decorated my teacher ukulele. Originally, the plan was for students to make ukuleles that would become school property; however, their eager interest in the process led to a discussion of ukulele student ownership with the administration (an expense not originally planned). Ultimately, students were allowed to keep their ukuleles, transporting them back and forth to school. The issue of protecting the instruments, a problem not originally anticipated when ukuleles were to remain at school, arose. I approached the sewing teacher and the students subsequently worked with her to design and create cases for their ukuleles. By mid-

year, each student had built a ukulele, sewn a case complete with a zipper, was able to read tablature notation, and could play a few short melodies and chords.

Throughout the school year, we continued our study of instruments and sound production with a number of different projects including developing our ukulele playing skills. By the end of the spring semester, the students were ready to perform at their 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation. We recorded a ukulele arrangement of “Pomp and Circumstance” as the processional music, prepared a live performance of “Hey There Delilah,” and recorded recessional music chosen by the girls. As my students walked down the aisle to start their graduation ceremony, their own ukulele performance emanated from the sound system. While these ukulele graduation performances were by no means perfect, they clearly showed how far the girls had developed as performers on the ukuleles they had built themselves.

At a faculty meeting shortly after graduation, one of the language arts teachers told me that she thought the music at graduation was a very appropriate developmental choice. She said she really liked how the 8<sup>th</sup> graders were the performers and that their learning was on display at graduation. Another teacher told me that she thought the music was just right, very appropriate for middle school. Teachers who had not attended the graduation ceremony asked me to play the recording as we began our end of the school year teacher inservice.

Despite these compliments, I have mixed feelings about this graduation performance. On the one hand, I am proud of what we accomplished. On the other hand, I disliked the fact that the end of the year focused heavily on preparation for the graduation performance. As a practitioner, I wondered, should public performances and the preparation for such be part of a general music curriculum?

## An Interdisciplinary<sup>1</sup> Work

This mixed methods inquiry examines middle level general music in K-12 music education. As such, it draws upon two fields, general music and middle level education. This study unites my interests in curriculum development, middle level education, and general music, and is equally grounded in the disciplines of curriculum and instruction as well as music education.

My work on this inquiry is modeled after that of the bricoleur—described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as a researcher open to diverse paradigmatic perspectives and the insights multiple perspectives provide. According to Kincheloe, “bricolage is concerned not only with multiple methods of inquiry but with diverse theoretical and philosophical notions of the various elements encountered in the research act” (2001, p. 682). The use of multiple paradigmatic perspectives creates a complex and entangled picture of a researched space, a picture that values divergence and dissonance as much as convergence and consonance (Greene & Hall, 2010).

According to Kincheloe:

Bricolage does not simply *tolerate* difference but *cultivates* it as a spark to researcher creativity. Here rests a central contribution of the deep interdisciplinarity of the bricolage: As researchers draw together divergent forms of research, they gain the unique insight of multiple perspectives. (2001, p. 687)

The unique insights resulting from an examination of a research question from multiple paradigmatic perspectives is the goal of a bricoleur researcher.

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<sup>1</sup>Here and in later sections of this document, the word “interdisciplinary” indicates work done across disciplinary boundaries. In this section, I refer to my own work across multiple disciplinary boundaries. Later, it is used to discuss the collaboration of teachers across subjects in middle level schools, regardless of the quality of these collaborations.



In this study I take a dialectic paradigmatic stance (Greene, 2007), placing realist/post-positivist insights in dialogue with interpretivist/phenomenological insights. Much like the bricoleur, a researcher taking a dialectic stance seeks a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of study by placing insights from multiple perspectives in dialogue. I use the disciplinary perspectives of middle level education and general music education along with multiple paradigmatic perspectives to develop a nuanced, detailed, and sometimes dissonant understanding of how middle level general music is taught throughout the United States. In bricoleur fashion, I weave these various disciplinary threads together into a series of reports and stories regarding the teaching of middle level general music, based on my survey and narrative findings collected during the 2014-2015 school year.

### **Philosophical Grounding**

The work of teachers, whether explicitly or implicitly, is guided by philosophical principles. As Reimer observes, “every time a choice is made [in the classroom] a belief is applied” (2003, p. 4). There are many choices a middle level general music teacher makes in determining the curriculum and pedagogy of his or her class. These choices are likely influenced, to varying degrees, by philosophical principles that shape general music education and middle level education, which in-turn are shaped by longstanding philosophical ideas in the larger field of education. The choices middle level general music teachers make are influenced, perhaps indirectly, by the philosophical principles of progressive and democratic education that permeate modern educational discourse. In this section, I briefly highlight the progressive and democratic ideas of Dewey (1916; 1938/1998), Bruner (1963), Kilpatrick (1936), and others, most relevant to this study. I then specify the foundational democratic principles of middle level education and general music.

Dewey argued (1902; 1938/1998) for orienting the curriculum toward students' needs and interests. Dewey claimed a teacher must "have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on the minds of those who are learning" (1938/1998, p. 33). This is not to say that a teacher can ever fully understand the minds of his or her students, but rather, knowledge of students as individuals, as well as knowledge of the developmental needs of students of a particular age, provides teachers with a foundation from which to construct a learning environment. Similarly, Bruner argued that "the task of teaching a subject to a child at any particular age is one of representing the structure of that subject in terms of the child's way of viewing things" (1963, p. 33). Most teachers would agree that learners in kindergarten require a learning environment different from those in seventh grade; however, teachers' knowledge of distinct and subtle developmental stages experienced by students as they mature is necessary for making ever more fine-grained distinctions regarding the needs of particular students. Since the developmental trajectories of individual seventh graders can vary dramatically, it is important to focus on both the developmental stage of the group of students and the needs of individuals.

Additionally, schools advocated for by both Bruner (1963) and Kilpatrick (1936) focus on the whole student and his or her needs. While educators are interested in the intellectual or cognitive development of students, an important component of progressive and democratic education is acknowledging that the social, emotional, and physical needs of students play a role in the development of students' intellectual abilities. These ideas manifest themselves through modern schools in programs such as free breakfasts, on-site hearing and vision tests, and counseling offices. In music education, the physical and emotional development of students impacts repertoire selected, instruments used, and many other curricular decisions. For young

adolescents, the transition from childhood to adolescence features physical, emotional, social, and cognitive changes that require educators who purposefully engage with the group of individuals at hand. No one-size-fits-all approach is adequate; each group of young adolescents is different from day to day.

When students as individuals are valued as the first step in the learning process, the curricular content of a particular subject area must be modified to meet student needs. According to Kilpatrick, “the child must for us [progressive educators] come before the subject matter” (1936, p. 31). One challenge in education is that teachers have spent many years becoming an “expert” in their particular discipline or academic subject area. As an expert, this subject area, which the teacher finds fascinating or engaging, is what he/she wants to share with children. However, adhering too strictly to subject area delineations only prevents students from gaining a full understanding of the world around them. Dewey argued that teachers should:

Abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child’s experience; cease thinking of the child’s experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process. (1902, n.p.)

For Dewey, academic content must be fluid because the subject-matter distinctions placed on schooling by the traditional disciplines hold “no direct relationship to the child’s present experience” (1902, n.p.). Dewey would have teachers see within and beyond their own academic area in order to help students see a particular subject in relation to other content areas and life beyond school.

In order to relate subject-specific learning to life, students must be given an opportunity to ask questions about their world and develop assignments in collaboration with their teacher

(Kilpatrick, 1936). According to Dewey, “no point in the philosophy of progressive education [is] sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process” (Dewey, 1938/1998, p. 77). In democratic schools, learning is passionate and engaging because it is rooted in the school context, the needs of students, and the questions students have about the world around them.

In classrooms, young people and teachers engage in collaborative planning, reaching decisions that respond to the concerns, aspirations, and interests of both. This kind of democratic planning, at both the school and classroom levels, is not the ‘engineering of consent’ toward predetermined decisions that has too often created the illusion of democracy, but a genuine attempt to honor the right of people to participate in making decisions that affect their lives. (Beane & Apple, 2007, p. 10)

Thus, a democratic curriculum “includes not only what adults think is important [discipline specific knowledge], but also the questions and concerns that young people have about themselves and their world” (Beane & Apple, 2007, p. 17). Because students are able to direct, co-construct, or choose the learning activity, the assumption is that they should see the learning as purposeful and related to their personal and individual needs. In these learning environments, teachers are not seen as deliverers of knowledge, but as guides and co-constructors of knowledge (Beane & Apple, 2007; Dewey, 1938/1998; Kilpatrick, 1936). It is the teacher’s responsibility to cultivate a classroom environment in which all can work together toward learning goals.

Students who work with teachers and classmates on engaging, active learning are seen as more likely to desire to continue learning, both within the particular subject area and beyond. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey stated, “the most important attitude that can be formed is that

of desire to go on learning” (1938/1998, p. 49). This sentiment, echoed in his earlier works (1902; 1916), has had a significant impact on the argument for music education throughout life and on how the middle level movement has attempted to reinvigorate, both philosophically and practically, learning for young adolescents. I turn now to the democratic principles that ground these two disciplines in education.

According to Lounsbury, considered one of the founders of middle level education, the middle level movement rests on two foundational ideals: “the nature and needs of young adolescents and the accepted principles of learning, both undergirded by a commitment to our democratic way of life” (Lounsbury, 2009, p. 32). From its earliest days, the middle level movement, was concerned with ensuring developmentally appropriate learning for young adolescents (Alexander et al., 1968; Beane, 1990; Eichhorn, 1966; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). In 1963, William M. Alexander, most often credited with the start of middle schools (McEwin, 1983; David, 1998), proposed middle level education as an alternative to the existing junior high model (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). In writing about the origins of the middle level movement, David claims the middle level movement:

did not spring from sterile, educational thought. It was the result of the work of dedicated and inspired leaders who recognized that traditional secondary practices did not meet the needs of emerging adolescents. William Alexander, Donald Eichhorn, John Lounsbury, Conrad Toepfer, and Gordon Vars, identified as founding fathers of middle level education . . . had the vision and determination to create a new and powerful educational reform effort for the 11- to 14-year-old child. . . . And they articulated a philosophy born out of the awareness that the middle level learner is a unique individual with special

needs that call for a distinctive educational program. (1998, p. ix)

The existing junior high model was failing to meet student needs because these schools “patterned themselves after the senior high school model by adopting practices such as a strong emphasis on subject matter specialization, departmentalization, and extensive extra-curricular programs and activities” without considering whether these features were adaptable to the unique developmental needs of young adolescents (aged 10-15) (McEwin & Greene, 2011, p. 5). In contrast, middle level schools focused on broad, comprehensive education that allowed students to explore the multifaceted nature of knowledge in a supportive and team-focused environment (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). Schools aligned with the middle level concept make curricular, pedagogical, and organizational decisions based on the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional needs of students between the ages of ten to fifteen. Though rarely explicitly articulated in the middle level literature, these democratic foundations can be traced to the work of Dewey, particularly his ideas about the child as a whole being who learns in an integrated way (1902), as well as his positive account of a child’s immaturity as the capacity for growth, development, and change (1916). The focus on the developmental needs of students in early adolescence, and helping students to grow and develop as whole persons in healthy ways, is the foundational democratic principle guiding the curricular, pedagogical, behavioral, and organizational purposes of the middle level movement.

As a parallel (though historically earlier) development in education, general music also draws upon democratic educational ideals. General music is simultaneously one of the most often used and least well-defined terms within music education. General music is the course Hoffmann calls “the heart of the music program” (1981, p. 42), but the term is used often to denote music instruction within schools, most prominently in elementary schools, that is not

ensemble (choir, band, or orchestra) based (Fitch, 1994; Runfola & Rutkowski, 1992). Music educators hold many conceptualizations of general music. As Haldeman explains:

Some say that it is the ‘meat and potatoes’ of the music program. Others describe general music as the trunk of the tree, that is, the main body of musical study, out of which grows the limbs of performance opportunities for those with special interests and talents. To some, general music is music instruction given in elementary K-6 classrooms by classroom teachers, music specialists, or a combination of the two. To others, it is a name given to classes offered in middle, junior high, and senior high schools for those students who do not participate in performing ensembles. To still others, general music is a concept that includes these descriptions and is expanded to embrace preschool, K-12, higher education, and continued lifelong musical learning. (1988, pp. 2-3)

Over time, the definition of general music has coalesced around two defining democratic characteristics: 1) inclusion of all students, and 2) comprehensive musical content (Abril, 2016). First, most general music teachers agree with Karl Gehrken's slogan “Music for Every Child, Every Child for Music” (Munkittrick, 2013)—stating the belief that every child deserves to develop knowledge and skills in music (Reimer, 2003)—as a principle guiding their teaching of general music. Hoffmann agrees, stating that general music is “the single most democratic part of music education because we say it’s for everybody” regardless of age, talent, or ability (1981, p. 42; see also Abril, 2016; Andrews, 1971; Monsour, 1995; Reimer, 1994; Thompson, 1993; White, 1961). Second, general music is democratic in its content, meaning that the musical skills, genres, and content covered are inclusive and wide-ranging. Abril argues that “if the musical experiences in school music are singular and rigid, they fall outside of the concept of general music” because a defining characteristic of general music is the comprehensive nature of

the musical content (2016, p. 15; see also Barrett, 2016; Reimer, 2003). According to Barrett, “general music is inclusive of all forms of musical engagement—listening, singing, playing, evaluating, composing, improvising, moving, situating music in time and place, and responding and relating to music” (2016, p. 172). Similarly, Hedden suggests that music educators focus on a conceptualization of general music as “multidimensional” and see it as “the *foundation* for all other areas of music” (2002, pp. 1-2, emphasis in original). At my school, all students experience general music throughout their three years of middle school, enabling a progressive development of musical skills and knowledge across sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. However, this three-year access to general music learning is not a given at every middle school in the US. Whether young adolescents continue learning music as part of their middle school education is often a state, district, or school-level decision, beyond the purview of an individual teacher. Yet the ideal that all students should receive a multifaceted education in music remains the democratic cornerstone guiding the teaching of general music to students of any age.

### **The Dilemma**

What, then, is middle level general music? As a practitioner, I define middle level general music as developmentally appropriate music learning for ALL young adolescents, music learning that inspires students to continue learning (formally or informally) in music. My definition comes from interpreting what I know and have learned about general music through the lens of the principles that guide the middle level movement. While based partially on my own knowledge of middle level education, my school community reinforces these ideas. At my middle school, teachers meet regularly to discuss the changing needs of our students as individuals and as grade-level groups. These discussions about students inform how and what we teach and help us improve our work as teachers because we put the evolving physical,



cognitive, social, and emotional needs of our students at the center of our work. For teachers at my school, individual student needs come before the subject matter, an aspect of middle level learning that guides most decisions at our school. My school is particularly centered on education for young adolescents; however, not all music teachers are as familiar with the middle level movement or work in schools focused on the needs of each young adolescent in the building. Thus my definition of middle level general music is just one in a plethora of descriptions, definitions, and principles used by teachers to guide their curriculum and pedagogy in middle level general music.

While often philosophically grounded, definitions or descriptions of middle level general music provide little to guide a music educator in developing his or her curriculum. Many issues impact the development of a middle level general music curriculum, including: schedules of 6, 9, or 12 weeks of class time; access to musical instruments and resources; and requirements of standards, administrators, or the state. In addition to these parameters that vary by both school and district is the knowledge, expertise, and experience of the music teacher assigned to general music, each teacher different from the next.

As a middle school general music teacher, I regularly wrestle with questions regarding the balance between musical content knowledge and middle level educational principles. Some of the many questions I ask are: What exactly is the purpose of general music for middle school students? What musical knowledge and skill is demonstrated through public performance, and what gets left behind depending on how regularly performance preparation is the focus? When does a class cease its identity as a general music class and become a performance class, and who has the authority to make this distinction? Is the interdisciplinary collaboration between students, colleagues, and the general music teacher appropriate for general music or do these

projects stray too far from musical content? Are projects directed by students, like the ukulele creation, appropriate for general music or too focused on the changing whims of young adolescents? How do I balance what my specific students need against what I know they ought to learn about music?

The practitioner literature testifies that I am not alone in asking questions about the nature of middle school general music. As early as 1935 (and perhaps earlier), questions about how to enliven and engage young adolescents enrolled in general music classes are found in the practitioner literature (Gehrkins, 1935). In 1994 in an article in *General Music Today*, Reimer shared some of the questions he felt were challenging teaching and learning in general music:

What, exactly, do we believe everyone ought to learn about music? Should such learnings be focused on the improvement of musical experience itself as their point and purpose? If so, should we pursue general learnings about music; that is, learnings at high levels of generality? If so, what are they? And why those? Or are we aiming to have all people master a set of specific, operational musical learnings? If so, what set? And why? Or is our purpose to include music in a broader education to which it makes a contribution? That is, are we pursuing ‘music in general education’? If so, what contribution does it make? What learnings would be relevant to such a contributory role?

(pp. 3-4)

Though Reimer speaks about general music across the ages, a review of articles on middle school general music indicate that these questions persist. Questions regarding the musical knowledge and skills appropriate for middle level general music are answered in a number of articles offering general curricular suggestions (Bawell, 1992) or specific suggestions such as the integration of world or popular music (Mills, 2000; Moore, 1992; Reynolds, 2008), alternative

forms of notation such as guitar tablature (Thompson, 2011), composition (Bush, 2007), or popular media (Dubach, 2005; Thibeault & Evoy, 2011) into the general music curriculum. Typically these articles provide suggestions for activities and argue that the curricular approach discussed will connect with middle school students, implying teachers struggle to make these kinds of curricular decisions. In addition, a number of resource books available provide additional suggestions about middle school general music (Burton, 2012; Hinckley & Shull, 1996; McAnally, 2009; Regelski, 2004) and potentially help to answer teachers' questions about designing their general music curriculum. While Reimer (1994) raised his questions about general music more than two decades ago, in 2011, an entire issue of *General Music Today* focused on suggestions for middle, as well as high school, general music. In her introduction to the issue, Cooper asks readers, "how do you define secondary general music?" (2011, p. 1) She then reflects that this is a difficult question for teachers to answer and suggests that there are endless possibilities, while warning that "determining which of 'the endless possibilities' to include in the classroom often poses the greatest challenge" (2011, p. 1). These and other questions about middle level general music posed throughout the practitioner literature suggest that music educators' questions about middle school general music are an ongoing dilemma within the field.

The questions I faced in my own practice brought me to this inquiry, but I desired to understand the perspectives and experiences of other teachers in order to better comprehend the ways in which middle level general music was practiced beyond my scope of experience. I sought out the thoughts, struggles, histories, and opinions of other music teachers to generate insight into the principles that guide their choices for curriculum and shape their teaching practice. This study was conducted during the same school year I was building ukuleles with my

eighth graders. This inquiry began with who I am as a teacher, but has also changed who I am because of what I have learned.

Each teacher, myself included, lives by many principles. Lived experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom, impact how teachers think about middle level learners and the curriculum and pedagogy of general music. Individual understandings, how teachers respond to researcher's questions, and the actions taken in the classroom, are shaped by teaching context, teaching experience, personal musicianship, and preservice and inservice professional development. As practice and experience evolves, so too do principles. This dissertation presents just some of the many ideas, opinions, and stories that inform the teaching of middle level general music in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2: YOUNG ADOLESCENTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION FOR ALL

In this chapter, I examine two separate yet parallel tracks of educational research, the first in middle level education and the second in general music at the middle level. Then, I attempt to connect middle level education and music education by examining the limited literature that unites the two disciplines. The gaps in the literature, particularly at the intersection of these two fields within education, lead to the research questions that guide this inquiry, presented at the end of the chapter.

### **Middle Level Education**

The recognition of young adolescence as a unique period in life, separate from childhood and from later stages of adolescence, signaled a change in American education for students between the ages of 10 and 15. The impetus for this change began with two important publications: *Growing up Forgotten* (1977) and *Turning Points: Preparing American Young for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1989). While the idea of middle schools began in the 1960s with the work of Eichhorn (1966), Alexander (Alexander et al., 1968), and others, these two publications, the former submitted to the Ford Foundation and the latter a Carnegie Council Report, are responsible for propelling the movement forward. Having found little consistency in understanding (from societal and scholarly perspectives) of young adolescence, Lipsitz (1977) concluded her *Growing up Forgotten* study with a call to researchers, teachers, doctors, and others knowledgeable in young adolescence to share knowledge across disciplines in order to “promote an integrative dialogue about early adolescence” (p. 207). More than ten years later, the Carnegie Council published its report on the state of middle level education in the United States, and concluded:

Most young adolescents attend massive, impersonal schools, learn from unconnected and seemingly irrelevant curricula, know well and trust few adults in school, and lack access to health care and counseling. Millions of these young people fail to receive the guidance and attention they need to become healthy, thoughtful, and productive adults. (Hamburg, 1989, p. 13)

The original Carnegie Report stated that all fifteen year olds in America should be intellectually reflective, healthy, caring, and ethical good citizens, “enroute to lifetime of meaningful work” (Hornbeck, 1989, p. 15), and that their education, starting from the age of ten, should strive to meet these goals. This report suggested that an important component of middle grades education should be close attention to student needs and developing a sense of community, most prominently by dividing larger schools into smaller communities or “teams” of teachers responsible for teaching the same group of students. The Carnegie Report also encouraged the use of cooperative and active learning in a variety of subjects and called for teachers specifically prepared to work with young adolescents. The Council cautioned that the current schools serving young adolescents were not supporting this important time of transition, and many young adolescents were either in danger of dropping out of school or in actual physical danger.

According to McEwin & Greene, the existing junior high model was failing to meet student needs because these schools “patterned themselves after the senior high school model by adopting practices such as a strong emphasis on subject matter specialization, departmentalization, and extensive extra-curricular programs and activities” without considering whether these features were adaptable to the unique developmental needs of young adolescents (2011, p. 5). Studies following Lipsitz (1977) and the Carnegie Council (1989) (see also Carnegie Corporation, 1995; Franklin, 1990; Millington, 1992; NMSA, 1997; Stevenson & Erb,

1998) examined whether the change to an emphasis on young adolescence, resulting primarily in a shift from junior high schools to middle schools, was in name only or done purposefully with the *Turning Points* recommendations at the heart. Primarily examining whether schools and districts have implemented the recommendations of the Carnegie Council Report, these studies provided support for initiatives (such as interdisciplinary teams, advisories, and middle level specific teacher preparation) that shaped the middle level movement. One of the most prominent of those subsequent studies was Jackson and Davis' 2000 reexamination of the original *Turning Points* report. Jackson and Davis (2000) visited middle schools around the country, reported on progress made regarding the original Carnegie Report recommendations, revised the recommended goals originally proposed in 1989, and set a middle level agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Today the middle level community continues this work with more recent studies examining the implementation of Jackson and Davis' 2000 recommendations (see also Hough, 2003; O'Dowd, 2012; Pendred, 2011).

### **The Middle Level Concept**

The middle level concept is a conceptualization of middle level education, centered on the developmental needs of young adolescents, which evolved from the work of early middle level educators (Alexander et al., 1968; Beane, 1990; Eichhorn, 1966; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992; Lounsbury & Vars, 1978). The National Middle School Association, now called the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) and the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform currently guide this work in conjunction with middle level scholars. According to Brazee, "when we talk about the middle school concept, we mean to answer the question, 'What is the best educational plan for *every* young adolescent, ages 10-15' not just students in a named 'middle school' or a school with some combination of Grades 5-8"

(2005, p. 284). The work of educators focused on developmentally appropriate education for young adolescents is guided by three primary goals: 1) “concern for young adolescents as a distinct age group and the recognition that the 10-15-year-old time is a critical developmental period for learning;” 2) that “personal-social development and intellectual development are inseparable and work hand-in hand;” and 3) that “there are organizational structures—ways of grouping and organizing students—and curricular and instructional approaches that respond to the unique nature and needs of young adolescents” (Brazee, 2005, p. 284).

The most prominent expression of the middle level concept is a guiding document for middle level educators, administrators, and researchers produced by the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE): *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents (This We Believe)*. *This We Believe* states “the curriculum, pedagogy, and programs of middle grades schools must be based on the developmental readiness, needs, and interests of young adolescents” (NMSA, 2010, p. 5). First published in 1982, *This We Believe* was originally a professional guidelines document for the then fledgling National Middle School Association (original name of AMLE) founded in 1973 (NMSA, 2010). Much like the national standards and other music education position documents produced by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), this document serves as a “touchstone” statement of precepts for the middle level education community. Primarily designed for the practitioner or school administrator, *This We Believe*’s exposition of principles assists school leaders in focusing their institution’s philosophical frameworks and curricular structures.

Leaders of AMLE decided that *This We Believe* should be a living document subject to ongoing revisions as indicated by evolving research and practice in middle level education (NMSA, 2010, p. 64). Each subsequent edition has been designed and written by committee.



Now in its fourth edition, the 2010 committee of contemporary middle level education leaders drew on the most current research and practice in establishing sixteen characteristics of learning environments designed to further an education for young adolescents that is developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable (NMSA, 2010). Of these sixteen characteristics, five principles focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and were specifically relevant to this study:

- 1) Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them;
- 2) Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning;
- 3) Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant;
- 4) Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches;
- 5) Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it.

(NMSA, 2010, p. 14)

While these principles often guide middle level curriculum, instruction, and assessment, the empirical research providing support for these principles varies. In the sections below, each characteristic is briefly described and extant research supporting each characteristic is highlighted.

***This We Believe Characteristic 1.*** At the heart of the middle level concept is the importance of teachers and administrators knowledgeable in young adolescent development and aware and responsive to the uniqueness of each individual young adolescent as he or she evolves in this time of transition (Alexander, et. al, 1968; Eichhorn, 1966; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). The unique physical, cognitive, moral, social, and emotional changes undergone in young adolescence (Brown & Knowles, 2007; Roney, 2005; Scales, 2010; Stevenson, 2002) require educators who purposefully engage in designing curriculum and

implementing pedagogical strategies suited to the particular group of young adolescents at hand. According to Eichhorn (1966), the developmental demands of young adolescents demonstrate a commitment to curriculum that is continually adaptable in order to meet young adolescents' evolving needs.

The literature related to this characteristic focuses primarily on how teachers are prepared (during preservice) to teach young adolescents. Experts in the field of middle level education continually call for middle level focused preservice preparation (AMLE, 2012; Cooney, 2000; Jackson & Davis, 2000; National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform, 2002) in order to ensure that all teachers working with young adolescents understand the unique developmental needs of this age group. While the number of preservice middle level programs is increasing (McEwin, Smith, & Dickinson, 2003; McEwin & Smith, 2013), the reality is that most middle level teachers are not prepared in stand-alone middle level preservice programs, but rather in programs that prepare them to teach in multiple grade levels (Conklin, 2007; McEwin & Smith, 2013). Despite this reality, both the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform (2002) and AMLE (NMSA, 2010) support middle grades-specific preservice preparation. AMLE, in collaboration with The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation and with the support of the National Forum, has established a set of professional learning standards that must be met by any middle level preservice program seeking accreditation through The Council (AMLE, 2012).

Studies investigating this characteristic of *This We Believe* fall into one of three broad categories. First, a series of studies have examined the state of middle level preservice programs in the United States (McEwin, Dickinson, & Smith, 2003; 2004; McEwin & Smith, 2013; Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 2002; Van Zandt Allen, Ruebel, Greene, McDaniel, & Spencer,

2009). Second, a few studies specifically examine existing preservice programs designed to prepare middle level educators (Chen et al., 2012; Deering, Zuercher, & Apisa, 2010; Ramsey, 2002; Virtue, 2007a; White, Dever, Ross, Jones, & Miller, 2013). Finally, a number of studies have focused on the development of preservice teachers' middle level-focused identities while still in preservice preparation (both stand alone middle level programs and middle level certifications that accompany elementary or secondary programs) (Coward, Matteson, & Hamman, 2012; Howell, Cook, & Faulkner, 2013; Mee, Haverback, & Passe, 2012; Miller, Thompson, & Xu, 2012; Stonner, 1998; Thornton, 2013).

***This We Believe Characteristic 2.*** In middle level education, the classroom environment is conceptualized as a flexible, purposeful environment in which students and teacher work together collaboratively. Because middle level educators attempt to know their students and understand that one characteristic of young adolescent development is a desire for autonomy, there is much emphasis in the philosophy of middle level education on student-directed learning or learning designed through collaboration between teacher and students. These ideas are most clearly delineated in the early work of Eichhorn (1966) who believed in a learning environment where students actively participated in designing the curriculum. Nesin (2005) suggests that active purposeful learning that is cognitive, social, and moral requires a positive community environment in which the teacher takes on a different kind of leadership role. According to *This We Believe*, a classroom for young adolescents that meets this characteristic includes collaboration between students and the teacher, personal engagement of students with content, and empowerment of students as directors of their own learning.

There is limited research centered on collaborative learning environments for young adolescents. The most commonly researched topic is on the use of project-based curriculum in

middle schools (Gao, 2012; Grant & Branch, 2005; Johnson, Johnson, & Roseth, 2010). In these three studies, researchers examined the peer to peer collaboration that occurred during the course of a particular project. According to Grant and Branch (2005), when students received project feedback from peers, they stretched their own capacities and improved their projects. In this way, students became directors of their own learning.

Collaboration between teachers and students is even less examined in the research (Downes, 2013; Power & Power, 2013). Teachers and students working together in collaboration requires students to take on more responsibility for their own learning, as is developmentally appropriate, while teachers step back from their role as authority figures in the room. Power and Power (2013) and Downes (2013) both argued for teachers who hand more authority to students either through a team-oriented environment (Power & Power, 2013) or through crowd-sourcing technologies (Downes, 2013). According to *This We Believe*:

When students routinely assume the role of teacher, and teachers demonstrate that they are still learners, the conditions of a genuine learning community are present. Teachers participate actively in learning activities rather than just being observers of students at work. Such collaboration leads to increased achievement, demonstrates democratic processes, and furthers meaningful student-teacher relationships. (NMSA, 2010, p. 17)

Despite the importance of active, purposeful learning to the middle level concept, little research is available to support its success in the education of young adolescents.

***This We Believe Characteristic 3.*** The third characteristic of curriculum, instruction, and assessment specifies middle level curriculum that requires students to stretch themselves in order to master complex tasks (challenging) and allows students to try out many subjects and skills thus diversifying their educational experience (exploratory). According to *This We*

*Believe*, middle level curriculum should also connect directly to students' questions and understandings about the world and their own lives (relevant) and help students connect in school learning across subjects and to their outside of school lives (integrative). Johnston (2013) investigated student self-determination in a Montessori-focused middle school and found that personalized learning, student choice, and caring community were all important components of a relevant education according to the middle school participants. Curriculum that is challenging, exploratory, relevant, and integrative provides opportunities for middle level students to connect content learned in school to their lives outside of school (Howell, Thomas, & Ardasheva, 2011), explore their questions about the world (D. F. Brown, 2011; Gill, 1995; Waks, 2002), and participate in democratic society through community service (Thompson, 2013).

These characteristics of young adolescent curriculum are closely tied to Beane's (1990; 1993) theoretical work in developing a curriculum for middle level education focused on challenging, exploratory, and relevant curriculum within an umbrella of curriculum integration. According to Beane, there is no one single curriculum that can transform middle level education. This belief was based primarily on the fact that curriculum "developed apart from the teachers and young people who must live it is grossly undemocratic in the ways it deprives them of their right to have a say in their own lives and to learn and apply the skills and understandings associated with making important decisions" (1993, p. 16). Stemming from these beliefs, Beane structured guidelines for middle level curriculum with the following qualities: "a focus on general education, the exploration of self and social meanings, respect for the dignity of young people, grounding in democracy, prizing of diversity, personal and social significance, life-like and lively content and activities, and rich opportunities for enhancing knowledge and skill" (1993, p. 24). Beane encouraged teachers and schools to move beyond curriculum siloed into

academic disciplines, toward curriculum primarily in the form of project-based, student-directed, integrated learning experiences, learning that is exploratory, relevant, challenging, and integrative. According to Beane, “the centerpiece of [this middle level] curriculum would consist of thematic units whose organizing centers are drawn from the intersecting concerns of early adolescents and issues in the larger world” (1993, p. 68). While he set out this universal framework for middle level curriculum, Beane believed strongly in the democratic notion that the details of curriculum must be handled at each individual school so to best meet the needs of the particular group of students in question.

A number of studies in middle level education focus on the implementation of integrated curriculum (Alexander, 2001; Bailey, 2003; Brinegar & Bishop, 2011; D. F. Brown, 2011; Pate & Nesin, 2011; Springer, 2013; Virtue, 2007b), and integrated curriculum topics are regularly discussed in the practitioner literature (Carpenter & Anglin, 2000; Chirichello, Eckel, & Pagliaro, 2005; Doda & Knowles, 2008; Virtue, 2007b; Virtue, Wilson, & Ingram 2009; Whitehead, 2005). In a 2007 review of integrated learning at the middle level, Dowden argued that Beane’s approach to middle level curriculum is developmentally responsive and highly relevant to the needs of middle level students.

Extending Beane’s ideas regarding curriculum integration at the middle level, Shankar-Brown (2013) argued for a life-centered, relevant curriculum at the middle level. Life-centered curriculum, she argued, emphasizes meaningful learning because it focuses on making school learning relevant to students’ lives. In this approach to curriculum integration, students’ questions about the world around them, and/or topics that relate directly to “real life,” are forefront. However, this approach also challenges the traditional school learning environment because bell schedules and teachers, expert in only one discipline, do not easily accord with the

organic and interconnected nature of a life-centered curriculum based on students' questions and concerns. According to Shankar-Brown, "as educators, we must commit ourselves to reprioritizing the traditional subject-centered approach to engage students first and foremost, as opposed to engaging subjects first and foremost" (p. 249). By engaging students first, before emphasizing a particular subject matter, middle level teachers develop authentic and relevant integrated curriculum that creates a positive learning environment.

In middle level education, interdisciplinary teaming of teachers is considered one of the markers of a school aligned with the middle level concept (Alexander et al., 1968; Alexander, 1998; Boyer & Bishop, 2004; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992; McEwin & Greene, 2011; McTague, 1997; Willis, 2005, Wills, 1988). Most commonly in this approach, disciplinary teachers are grouped into a team, given common planning time, and assigned to teach the same group of students (Alexander et al., 1968; Arhar, 1992; 2013; Mac Iver, 1990; Styron & Nyman, 2008). While this often enables teachers to discuss particular students across several subject areas, it does not always foster integrated or interdisciplinary curriculum planning or implementation (Beane, 1993). In addition, teachers in the so-called "special" areas, such as music, are typically, not involved in the interdisciplinary teams commonly restricted to language arts, math, science, and social studies teachers, based on scheduling (Beane, 1993; Burnaford, 1993; Hamann, 2007; Moore, 1994; Snyder, 2001).

***This We Believe Characteristic 4.*** According to characteristic four of *This We Believe* curriculum, instruction, and assessment, "educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches" (NMSA, 2010, p. 22). Many approaches to teaching and learning including integrated curriculum, project-based learning, and teacher-student collaborative planning have been discussed above. *This We Believe* suggests that "while some direct, teacher-centered

instruction is in order, varied approaches are needed including experiments, demonstrations, surveys and opinion polls, simulations, inquiry-based and group projects, community-based services, and independent study” (NMSA, 2010, p. 23). In many ways, this characteristic emphasizes what is considered by many to be good teaching, regardless of the age of the students involved; however, these strategies are particularly relevant to young adolescents given their developmental abilities and needs.

It is somewhat difficult to identify research on this characteristic because it is 1) intertwined with the literature discussed above in characteristic two and three, and 2) often discipline specific—research focused specifically on one of the “core”<sup>2</sup> subject areas: math, literacy, science, or social studies education (see also Boakes, 2009; Brause, 2010; DiCamillo & Gradwell, 2012; Gutstein, 2003; Krajcik & Czerniak, 2007; Rhodes, 2010; Weinberg, Basile, & Albright, 2011). In a summary chapter focused on this characteristic of *This We Believe*, Brodhagen and Gorud (2005) described a number of teaching strategies including questioning techniques, projects, and parallel teaching appropriate for young adolescents. In addition, the use of varied teaching and learning strategies extends to differentiated learning (Strahan, Kronenberg, Burgner, Doherty, & Hedt, 2012; Tomlinson, 2013) and the use of technologies in the classroom (Bishop & Downes, 2013; Downes & Bishop, 2015; Storz & Hoffman, 2013; Yager & Akcay, 2008). Both differentiated and technology-based learning strategies at the middle level are supported by an increasing number of studies focused specifically on middle level education.

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<sup>2</sup>In educational discourse, the subject areas of math, science, history, and literacy are often separated from the fine, performing, and applied arts, physical education, and other elective courses through terminology. The term “core” is one of many terms used to indicate the former subject areas while “specials,” “encore” “elective,” and “exploratory” denote the latter. I place this word in quotes because the term suggests that music courses are not as central to a total student education as math, science, history, and literacy.



***This We Believe Characteristic 5.*** Teachers who utilize a variety of teaching and learning strategies invariably also use a variety of assessments. *This We Believe* characteristic five emphasizes that assessments should occur throughout the learning process, change form depending on the learning task, be differentiated based on the needs of students, allow students time to reflect on their learning, and involve students in the design process (NMSA, 2010). Empirical literature on this aspect of middle level learning is limited (Capraro et al., 2011; Thompson & French, 2005), likely because it is often intertwined with one of the teaching strategies discussed above. For example, in a narrative study on the reading comprehension of African American male students, Piazza (2010) found that multiple forms of reading assessments provided a clearer picture of how these students understood and contextualized reading assignments within their own experiences. Piazza suggested a need for multiple assessments as well as culturally relevant means of assessment. In another study, Chappuis and Stiggins (2008) discussed the importance of balance between formative and summative assessments and suggested that teachers ask themselves five questions when developing assessments: 1) why assess, 2) assess what, 3) assess how, 4) communicate how, and 5) involve students how. Finally, Davis (2003) investigated the use of reflection prompts in middle school science and found that generic reflection prompts generated more comprehensive student answers and deeper scientific understanding than guided reflection prompts. While studies addressing diverse assessment of young adolescent learning exist, I found no empirical study specifically examining student and teacher collaboratively designed assessments or differentiated assessments at the middle level.

## Success of the Middle Level Concept

In a series of school-level surveys extending from 1968 through to the most recent in 2009, the middle level movement has documented the progress of the middle level concept in young adolescent education<sup>3</sup> (Alexander, 1968; Alexander & McEwin, 1989; McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996; 2003; McEwin & Greene, 2011). Most recently, in 2009, McEwin and Greene conducted two national surveys, one of a random sample of US middle schools and the other of those US middle schools recognized as “highly successful” by one of two organizations<sup>4</sup> (2010; 2011). McEwin and Greene’s surveys (2011) assessed the level of importance principals placed on various aspects of the middle level concept (taken from the 2003 version of *This We Believe*) as well as the level of implementation of these aspects into the school environment. According to Lounsbury (2009), the major issue faced by the middle level community is not that the content of the middle level concept is lacking, but rather that consistent and complete implementation is difficult. Hence the latest middle level survey assessed elements of the middle level concept including interdisciplinary teaming, curriculum content, advisory programs, pedagogical strategies, and the professional licensure of teachers (McEwin & Greene, 2011). Principals ranked the importance of these elements, and the researchers then compared the principal’s ranking to the level of implementation at the responding principal’s school.

When the levels of importance respondents placed on selected middle level components are compared with the same respondents’ levels of implementation in their own schools,

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<sup>3</sup>Similar studies, at local or state-wide levels have also been conducted to examine the impact of the middle level concept on the learning environment (Kazda, 2004; Meeks & Stepka, 2004; Millington, 1992; Styron & Nyman, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>According to McEwin and Greene, “the sample in this survey, the Highly Successful Middle Schools (HSMS) survey, was middle schools that have received recognition as *Schools to Watch* in a program sponsored by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform and/or by recognition as *Breakthrough Middle Schools* in a program sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)” (2011, p. 31).

it is apparent that many middle level principals understand the importance of recommended middle level programs and practices even when they are not fully implemented or implemented at all, in their schools. The problem may lie with the difficulties of implementing and maintaining these developmentally responsive programs and practices in the face of standardized testing pressures, opposition from traditionalists, and other such factors. (McEwin & Greene, 2011, p. 30)

Those schools recognized as “highly successful” (by the external organizations) had higher rates of implementing the tenets of *This We Believe*, as well as a higher correlation between a principal’s importance rating and the school’s level of implementation.<sup>5</sup> There is recognition here by McEwin and Greene that those schools recognized as “highly successful” middle level schools expend more effort toward developing a learning climate best suited to the developmental needs of young adolescents. However, they conclude their study by stating: “while gains have been made in some areas, the tenets of middle level education remain far from being universally implemented” (McEwin & Greene, 2011, p. 56).

### **Do Teachers Agree with the Middle Level Concept?**

From the 1960s onward, as middle level schools were established or junior high schools were reconfigured, researchers have sought to understand teachers’ attitudes toward this curricular and pedagogical transformation of education for young adolescents. The research regarding teacher attitudes toward the middle level concept is both discipline-specific and cross-curricular. The following is a brief overview of research conducted in this area.

In a majority of the literature surveyed, researchers investigated teacher attitudes toward a particular facet of the middle level concept, such as working in interdisciplinary teams

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<sup>5</sup>This result is unsurprising given that the schools identified as “highly successful” in this research study were given their recognition(s) by advocacy organizations that support and promote the middle level concept as an important component of education for young adolescents. In effect, this is a circular result.

(Dellinger, 1992), working with heterogeneous classes of students (Fisher, 2012; Korejwa, 2009; Morgan-Conner, 1995), or establishing positive teacher to student relationships (Evola, 2004; Updegraff, 2011). In some cases, researchers examined the relationship between more than one aspect of the middle level concept. For example, Evola (2004) examined the relationship between teacher attitudes and student connectedness to school, while Korejwa (2009) examined the relationship between teacher attitudes and student academic achievement groupings.

In addition, the body of literature generated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, at the height of the junior high/middle level conversion, examined teacher attitudes regarding the redesign of a school in alignment with the middle level concept. In 1984, Best-Laimit examined the first year of operation of a new middle school and documented the teachers' perceptions of the change from a junior high to a middle level model (1985). Teachers at this school had positive opinions of the new teaming approach implemented at the school and felt that the transition was an easy one overall. Both Dellinger (1992) and Major (1983) examined multiple structural changes within schools, as related to the middle level concept, and teachers' attitudes toward these changes to the learning environment. In 1983, Butler sought to understand if the level of implementation of the middle level concept at schools in Oklahoma held any relationship to teachers' attitudes toward the concept. However, he found that Oklahoma schools overall had only low levels of implementation of the middle level concept and thus he could not determine differences in teacher attitudes (Butler, 1983).

Of more importance in recent years is the impact of preparation in the middle level concept on teacher attitudes. Conklin (2007) examined the two preservice options (elementary and secondary) available to middle level teachers at one university and the influence of the different social studies methods courses within these two options. She found that teachers of

both methods courses, one within an elementary-focused (3-8) program and the other within a secondary (6-12) program, taught the preservice teachers similar instructional strategies for the teaching of social studies; however, each teacher differently influenced how preservice teachers thought about middle level students' capabilities, despite the fact that neither course explicitly addressed the unique characteristics of middle level learners (Conklin, 2007). Similarly, White and colleagues (2013) sought to understand how middle level teachers in Ohio perceived their own practices and their school environments by following the 2003 cohort of students graduating with a middle level license. The themes that emerged aligned with the middle level concept and the authors concluded that most teachers had a modest understanding of how the middle level concept was implemented in their classroom or school (White, Dever, Ross, Jones, & Miller, 2013).

Finally, Huss (2000; 2004) examined sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers' acceptance of the middle level concept in order to determine if inservice school climate or teacher preservice preparation had greater influence on teacher attitudes. Huss (2000) suggested that where significant differences in teacher attitudes occurred, it was related to teachers' adherence to traditional rather than progressive notions of curriculum and pedagogy. Huss also made the interesting finding that "teachers who teach sixth grade in an elementary building, teachers who are elementary-certified, teachers who teach middle level grades in a K-8 building, and teachers who are secondary-certified appear to be the most vulnerable to a departure from the tenets of the middle school philosophy" (2004, p. 8), possibly due to other school community influences or from lack of middle level preservice preparation.

Empirical research examines middle school teachers' attitudes toward the middle level concept; however, the research studies discussed above focus on teachers in "core" subject areas,

thus ignoring many teachers with whom students interact on a daily basis. Math, science, social studies, and literacy teachers cannot be fully responsible for implementation of the middle level concept at schools serving young adolescents; this effort must be upheld by all teachers, yet teachers in “auxiliary” subjects are not included in these middle level focused research investigations. Little work appears to have been done in examining the attitudes of music teachers (or other “specialist” teachers) toward the middle level concept.

### **Grade Level Configuration Debate**

A number of scholars have questioned the relationship between the grade level configuration of schools serving young adolescents and student academic and social achievement. According to a national study by McEwin and Greene (2011), young adolescents in the United States attend schools in a variety of grade configurations. Though their study focuses exclusively on public schools, the data are useful in understanding the grade configurations of schools in which young adolescents are educated throughout the United States. In 2008, there were 13,227 schools that served grades 5-8, 6-8, or 7-8, commonly referred to as middle schools (McEwin & Greene, 2011). Additionally, “there were also 5,200 public elementary schools in 2008 that began with grade Pre-K, K, or 1 and ended in grade 8” (2011, p. 6). According to this survey, young adolescents were also educated in 1,183 school buildings serving grades six through twelve and 440 schools serving only one grade level (2011).

There have been a number of studies (Juvonen et al., 2004; Meyer, 2011) examining the success of students in K-8 schools as compared to students attending middle schools. In the middle school literature, much discussion centers on the transition students experience, emotionally and cognitively, when changing schools after fourth, fifth, or sixth grade (George, 2005; Gewertz, 2004; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Parker, 2010; Whitley, Lupart, & Beran, 2007). In

addition to these concerns about the psychological toll this transition has on young adolescents, studies comparing student success in the two grade level configurations are often in response to the claim that middle schools themselves are not academically rigorous (Yecke, 2005; 2006) and thus the schools themselves are responsible for the slip in academic performance that appears to occur during the middle grades years. In the current era of student testing, a number of prominent studies (Abella, 2005; Clark, Slate, Combs, & Moore, 2013; Keegan, 2009; Offenberg, 2001; Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010; Sanders-Smith, 2009; Warthan, 2011; West & Schwerdt, 2012) have examined the test scores of students attending K-8 schools as compared with students attending middle grades schools, the results of which have been mixed.

Contributing to this line of inquiry, two recent studies (Rockoff & Lockwood, 2010; West & Scherdt, 2012) examined grade level configuration and academic achievement questions and found declines in student achievement among those attending middle grades schools. Using standardized test scores in literacy and math from students attending New York City public schools between 1998 and 2009, Rockoff and Lockwood (2010) determined that those attending middle grades schools had a drop in test scores in fifth through eighth grade when compared with peers attending K-8 schools. Similarly, student achievement in Florida was tracked from grade three to grade ten (between 2000 and 2009) by West and Schwerdt (2012). These researchers found a drop in academic achievement for those who attended middle grades schools, as compared with those who remained in a K-8 environment. This drop in achievement also appeared to lead to larger school dropout rates amongst those who attended middle grades schools (West & Schwerdt, 2012).

Two recent dissertation studies using standardized test results to compare K-8 and 6-8 schools are worthy of note. Sanders-Smith (2009) examined the end-of-grade test results of

eighth grade students in eastern North Carolina over a three-year period. She found no statistical differences in academic performance in English or math between students attending K-8 schools or 6-8 schools. Similarly, Warthan (2011) found no statistical differences between the eighth grade standardized test scores in English and math of students attending K-8 or 6-8 institutions in the states of Virginia and South Carolina. However, he found that students attending middle schools in Maryland scored higher than their K-8 peers, while students attending K-8 schools in North Carolina scored higher than their middle school peers. These mixed results of Warthan's study prevent generalizations beyond the four individual states examined, particularly given that the data analyzed was collected on the state-administered standardized tests.

The return of urban school districts to a K-8 model, particularly in Philadelphia's City school district, provides important data to the grade configuration debate (Byrnes & Ruby, 2007; Offenber, 2001; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006). Due to the nature of the school system, this transition allowed researchers to compare students attending longstanding K-8 schools, existing middle schools, and newly formed K-8 schools. Byrnes and Ruby (2007) conducted a longitudinal study from 1999-2004 focused on reading and math achievement on the district administered standardized test. This study attempted to control for a variety of student level variables (such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, among others). One of their major findings is that, while students at well-established K-8 schools had higher test scores, there was no significant difference between those attending middle schools and newly established K-8 schools. They also found that most of the variation in reading and math scores was not related to the type of school the students attended, but rather to the differences within the students themselves. These researchers conclude that student demographics and neighborhood are the primary factors creating the difference between the old and new K-8 schools. They suggest that deciding to



change middle schools to K-8 schools will not improve student achievement if school demographics remain unchanged. In another Philadelphia City School District study, Weiss and Kipnes (2006) used data collected by the school district to examine the effects of school configuration on the achievement and self-esteem of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. The researchers found that the racial and socio-economic demographics of students attending the district's K-8 schools were different than students attending the district's middle schools, and thus they controlled for these two variables in their statistical modeling. Once the researchers controlled for differences between students at K-8 and middle schools, they found that students attending middle schools were likely to have lower self-esteem and likely to feel less safe at school as compared with their K-8 peers. However, their results showed that “there is little difference in student performance based on the type of school that [students] attend” (p. 264). Based on their models, there were no academic achievement differences between students attending K-8 and those attending middle schools.

Some of the earliest data on the impact of the middle grades school transition on academic achievement comes from two studies conducted in the early 1990s (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991). Eccles, Lord, and Midgley found declines in student motivation after the transition to middle school and suggested that these declines were not a “natural” part of young adolescence, but due primarily to school and classroom environment. These researchers concluded their presentation of the two studies reported by stating “what is critical is the nature of the school environment — not the grade-span configuration or the timing of the transition” (Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991, p. 539). In a more recent study, Styron and Nyman (2008) compared 6-8 schools making adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years with 6-8

schools failing to do so and found that the differences between these two groups of 6-8 schools were related to the climate of the school community.

In 2012, Carolan and Chesky (2012) used national data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal study to examine math and reading achievement as well as the school attachment of students attending K-8, 6-8, and 7-8 schools. This national study controlled for a variety of student demographics and found that attendance at a K-8 school had no significant relationship on achievement in either math or reading. However, the study did find that students with a positive attachment to their school had greater academic success in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The authors suggested that school attachment relates to a positive school climate, which reformers should consider over restructuring the grade level configuration. According to Carolan and Chesky,

This speaks to the idea that most young adolescents experience a move to a more negative school environment, which is most likely to be a grades 6-8 school because it is the most prevalent configuration. Therefore, focusing on either the transition itself or the grade span may direct attention away from the most critical component—the school’s environment. (2012, p. 37)

These findings related to school climate and student achievement have implications for school-level implementation of the middle level concept. Prominent middle school researcher Hough (1995; 2005) argues for a school he labels as an *elemiddle*. An *elemiddle* is a version of a K-8 school that is *recultured* so that students between the ages of 10-15 are educated differently than those younger; in other words, the middle level concept guides the decisions made by school leaders and teachers when structuring learning for the young adolescents attending the school (George, 2005; Hough, 1995).

Just as every 6-8 school is not a bona fide middle school, not every K-8 is an elemiddle. Only those schools configured with continuous grade spans that begin with kindergarten or pre-kindergarten and end after the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in which the upper grade spans are implementing middle-level best practices should be labeled elemiddles. (Hough, 2005, n.p.)

According to Hough (2005), the philosophical approach utilized by the school is the key to the success of a school for young adolescents, configured either as a K-8 or middle grades building. The concept of an elemiddle, focused on a school climate appropriate for young adolescents, is supported by the findings of Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991), Styron and Nyman (2008), and Carolan and Chesky (2012), discussed above.

In this section I have reviewed the literature that guides scholarship and practice in middle level education. The *Growing up Forgotten* (Lipsitz, 1977) and *Turning Points: Preparing American Young for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Carnegie, 1989) publications gave rise to the middle level concept and the *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) document. The characteristics of *This We Believe*, the progress of the middle level movement, and teachers' opinions of the middle level concept are all examined in the empirical literature. In addition, a major debate within the literature is the grade configuration of schools that best prepare young adolescents for success. One critique of the literature discussed in this section is the absence of focus on learning in the arts. This was specifically mentioned in the section on teacher opinions, but is also relevant to the empirical examination of standardized test scores (in English and math) as the only measure used to assess "academic success." The middle level movement's foundational principle is an education that is developmentally appropriate for young adolescents, a principle guiding an entire school community, not just the "core" curriculum, yet the majority of empirical

literature published in the field of middle level education focuses exclusively on math, literacy, science, and social studies content areas and teachers. In the next section, I discuss the literature in music education that shapes the teaching of general music, a class regularly taught to young adolescents, but excluded from the core-focused empirical literature in middle level education literature.

### **General Music at the Middle Level**

According to a 2009 national survey of randomly selected middle schools, general music is *required* for fifth grade students by 81% of schools, for sixth grade students by 43% of schools, for seventh grade students by 30% of schools, and for eighth grade students by 23% of schools, yet the implementation of this course varies (McEwin & Greene, 2011, p. 14). Hinckley and Shull (1996) call middle level general music “the all-important bridge between required general music instruction for all elementary students and traditionally elective music study for high school students” (p. 1). Even though this bridge course is a stated expectation of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) for *all* students through the eighth grade (MENC, 1991; 1994a), the 2009 survey above suggests a decrease in requirements as students age.

Empirical literature focused exclusively on middle school general music students, teachers, or curriculum, is fairly limited. Some studies addressing middle school general music are only tangentially related to teaching and learning in general music at middle schools, such as studies focused on achievement in K-8 general music (Alsobrook, 2013), student academic success and music program quality (Johnson & Memmott, 2006), music course enrollment (Hoffer, 1980), or the availability of music courses in a particular state or region (Schmidt, Baker, Hayes, & Kwan, 2006). The majority of available studies are either masters theses or

doctoral dissertations focused broadly on general music for students between ages 10 and 15 (Kim, 1990; Nelson, 1988; Ramsey, 1957) or on a narrow aspect of musical learning (Akintunde, 1996; Anderson, 1976; Ardrey, 1999; Dunn, 1992; Evans, 2013; Greher, 2002; Gremli, 2002; Johnson, 1994; Koch, 1989; Kyme, 1967; Moss, 1987; Perrine, 1989; Schneider, 2004; Schultz, 2000; Smith, 1984). In the sections below, I discuss relevant studies focused on students' opinions,<sup>6</sup> curriculum and pedagogy, teachers, and teachers' opinions.

### **Middle School General Music Students**

Six studies (Asmus, 1985; Boswell, 1991; Hamlen and Shuell, 2006; Thompson, 1991; Wayman, 2004; 2005) investigated the attitudes, views, preferences, and opinions of young adolescents enrolled in general music classes. First, Asmus (1985) used attribution theory to understand sixth graders' understandings of success or failure in music class and found that differences in teaching style could potentially impact whether a student perceived him/herself as successful in music. Second, Boswell (1991) investigated the attitudes of general music students (in grades 5-8) toward specific music class activities and also broader, overall attitudes toward general music class and found that students preferred playing instruments, creating music, and participating in any activity in which they were provided choice. Third, Thompson (1991) investigated seventh and eight grade students' attitudes toward common general music activities and found that the highest preferred activities involved rock music and musical creation. In conducting his study, Thompson also found a decline in the number of students participating in general music as compared with earlier studies (Boyle, Hosterman, & Noyes, 1981; Noyes & Boyle, 1972) with which Thompson was comparing his results.

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<sup>6</sup>The music education scholarship uses a number of terms, for example, "views," "perspectives," "opinions," "beliefs," "perceptions," and "attitudes," when investigating teacher or student ideas about a given topic. In discussing this literature, I use the word chosen by the original author when describing their work and contextualize this literature under the umbrella term of "opinions."

Hamlen and Shuell (2006) focused on student musical preferences in relation to familiarity with the musical excerpt heard. These scholars used an experimental setting in which different middle level general music classes either received audio-only stimuli or audio-and-visual stimuli when listening to and ranking their preferences for selected classical music tracks. Before engaging in the study, seventh grade students in general music classes were asked to complete an inventory specifying their familiarity with musical genres. The results of this study indicated that preference for classical excerpts was directly related to middle level general music students' familiarity with classical music (Hamlen & Schuell, 2006). One implication of this study was that the manner in which a music teacher introduces unfamiliar music to middle level general music students impacts students' willingness to engage with the selected repertoire. The authors suggested beginning with classical music familiar to students, such as pieces used in commercials or cartoons, before moving on to less familiar music.

Finally, Davis née Wayman conducted two studies focused on the opinions of middle school general music students. In 2004 Wayman interviewed three eighth grade students in a general music class to discover the students' attitudes and beliefs regarding their general music class and music education overall. Three themes emerged from the student interviews: 1) music class is fun, not serious; 2) some people are more musically talented than others; and 3) music is for entertainment (Wayman, 2004, p. 30). More recently, Wayman's dissertation study (2005) investigated the meaning of music education to students enrolled in middle level general music classes. She later published the results of her dissertation in a 2009 article (under the name Davis). In this study, Wayman (2005) surveyed 762 middle school general music students about the meaning of their general music class. According to Wayman's study, middle school students find meaning in their music learning in four ways: vocational, academic, belongingness, and

agency. Though Wayman does not discuss this in her dissertation, these four categories connect to important aspects of the middle level concept: specifically, curriculum that is relevant and engaging to students. Connecting course content to career possibilities and students' lives allows students to make meaning from general music learning and aligns with the principle of relevant curriculum specified in the middle level concept (NMSA, 2010). In addition, students who are allowed to make decisions about their learning (what Wayman calls agency) and who feel comfortable within their music classroom (what Wayman calls belongingness) are more likely to feel actively engaged in the learning process, another important principle of the middle level concept (NMSA, 2010). Though Wayman uses the terms vocational, belongingness, and agency, the students with whom she spoke identified two major components of a curriculum aligned with the middle level concept.

While three of these studies are over twenty years old and likely do not fully reflect the opinions of modern young adolescents, some consistency appears across these studies. Each of these studies suggests that young adolescents want teachers and musical content/activities with which they can personally connect. This finding suggests that targeted curriculum and pedagogical strategies are necessary to reach middle level students enrolled in general music classes.

### **Curricular and Pedagogical Choices**

A number of studies in middle school general music address questions related to specific curricular or pedagogical choices made by music teachers. Some studies investigated specific aspects of music curriculum including popular music (Gardner, 2015; Teitsma, 2010), world music (Brett Ryan, 2011), guitar (Fesmire, 2006), and composition (Ward, 2009). Other studies investigated pedagogical strategies such as those designed for students with disabilities (Whipple

& VanWeelden, 2012), creative problem solving (DeLorenzo, 1989), or classroom management (Spicer, 2014). In each of these studies, curriculum and pedagogy are intertwined, though the curricular content or the pedagogical strategy may be the focus of the investigation. One particular study (Quay, 1987) compared the outcomes of two different middle school general music curricula taught over the course of nine weeks.

Both Gardner (2015) and Teitsma (2010) investigated the use of popular music in middle level general music. Following an extensive literature review, Gardner (2015) utilized culturally relevant pedagogy to develop a unit on hip-hop music and culture for sixth grade general music. This unit was not implemented or evaluated as part of her study, but rather the unit design itself was the culmination of her extensive literature review focused on culturally relevant pedagogy and music education. Teitsma (2010) compared seventh grade general music students' aural listening skills following participation in either a popular music- or classical music-focused unit on listening skills. She found no differences in the development of aural listening skills, thus suggesting that these skills, if taught well, are transferable across genres.

Brett Ryan (2011) compared the implementation of an Andean music curriculum, taught in one sixth grade general music classroom through traditional Andean means of transmission, and taught in another sixth grade general music classroom through a traditional Western means of transmission. Her findings suggested that students learn Andean musical concepts better when taught through the traditional Andean means of transmission; less teacher-directed learning and more student to student collaboration were hallmarks of this more successful transmission process. While Brett Ryan's study focused on one particular musical culture, the pedagogical approach emphasizing group work parallels ideas in the middle level concept that encourage the



use of a variety of pedagogical strategies, preferably those that allow students to engage with peers, an important need of young adolescents.

Fesmire's 2006 survey study found that guitar courses at the middle school and high school levels were offered in a third of Colorado's public schools and that nearly eighty percent of students participating in guitar courses did not participate in traditional ensembles. This study examined the use of the National Standards for Music Education in these guitar courses and found that performance and listening were top curricular priorities. While most teachers in the study incorporated multiple musical styles, the most common musical style taught was rock/popular music. Fesmire also found that nearly seventy percent of teachers teaching guitar consider themselves self taught on guitar. Based on this result, Fesmire suggested that the standards have an important place in the curriculum, guitar teachers should incorporate a wide-range of musical styles, and that all preservice music educators in Colorado should be required to take a guitar pedagogy course.

In a 2009 study, Ward conducted an action research study on the use of composition and information and communication technology (ICT) in her own general music classes. Based on feedback from students collected over the course of the study, the researcher-teacher modified pedagogical strategies to better suit the needs and desires of participating students. These changes enabled better communication between teacher and student and established a team-focused environment in the general music classroom. According to the author, the result of this study was a more student-centered curriculum where "communication, peer help, context and inter-subjective meaning" were key to success in a composition focused curriculum (Ward, 2009, p. 164). The researcher also found that the technology used for composition was extremely motivating for young adolescents. While the author did not discuss the middle level concept,

many of the findings described above are key aspects of an education focused on the developmental needs of young adolescents.

Whipple and VanWeelden (2012) investigated preservice teachers placed in middle level general, ensemble, and studio music where enrollment included students with special needs. Following a five-week field experience, undergraduate preservice teachers were given a short survey to assess how important they felt specific learning supports were to reaching students with special needs. Of the learning supports investigated, preservice teachers found the echoing technique most effective across all music disciplines. However, the study also found that the most effective learning supports changed depending on the music learning context. For general music, echoing, a buddy system, color-coding, and visual aids were most effective, and the effectiveness of a particular technique was relative to the specific activity being conducted in the classroom. Though limited to learners with special needs, this study indicated that general music is a unique learning context requiring pedagogical strategies different from those required in other music learning contexts.

In 1989, DeLorenzo observed sixth grade students as they worked through creative problem solving prompts in general music class. DeLorenzo found that students moved through four interrelated characteristics of problem solving: 1) “perception of the problem structure,” 2) “search for musical form,” 3) “capacity to sense musical possibilities,” and 4) “degree of personal investment” (p. 193). In concluding her study, DeLorenzo suggested that “structured exploratory experiences along with related discussion may play a critical role in elevating students to higher planes of creative musicianship” (p. 197), a finding consistent with the middle level concept that encourages developing a challenging curriculum that requires students to “grapple with and master advanced concepts and skills” (NMSA, 2010, p. 18).

In her 2014 dissertation, Spicer designed and tested a proactive classroom management model for middle level general music that focused on “curriculum, lesson planning, organization, and community building rather than discipline” (p. 125). In the middle school general music classroom in which it was tested, the implementation of this approach decreased the number of detentions assigned in the classroom. Although middle school general music can be challenging for many music teachers, Spicer’s dissertation suggested that effective curricular and pedagogical planning, along with a teacher focused on developing classroom community, can lead to successful middle school general music classrooms.

Quay’s 1987 study examined two different curricular approaches to the nine-week general music class, a phenomenon that emerged from early middle school scheduling solutions designed to give students brief courses that allowed them to “sample” a variety of curricular content in various subjects. Quay examined a traditional curricular approach using the district guidelines and an experimental “related arts” curriculum approach designed for the study, both taught in the nine-week format by various teachers. She concluded her study (based on statistical analysis of student pre- and post-tests) by specifying that the curriculum itself had no impact on student achievement, though the interaction of teacher and curriculum were significant to student success on the post-test evaluation. In essence, Quay found that the curriculum itself did not impact student success on the post-test, but rather it was the teacher who had the greatest impact on the students.

### **General Music Teachers**

The musician-educators responsible for teaching middle level general music are a critical component to the success of these classes. As mentioned previously, one of the major tenets of the middle level concept is that educators who teach young adolescents are uniquely prepared to

do so (NMSA, 2010). A small number of studies specifically investigate teachers who teach middle level general music.

Russell (2012) assessed the teacher identity and musician identity of inservice secondary music teachers. Only eighteen percent of the teachers participating in this study were general music teachers, the rest were ensemble directors. Thirty-two percent of the secondary teachers investigated were middle level teachers, the rest worked in high schools. Although he did not separate findings related to middle level general music teachers, Russell found that high school music teachers had stronger musician identities than did middle school music teachers. Of interest here is that while Russell examined the relationship between music teachers' teacher identity and musician identity, he did not investigate any specific aspects related to the middle level concept that might have helped clarify the teacher identities expressed by middle level music teachers.

Curtis (1986) investigated a series of in-classroom verbal and non-verbal teacher behaviors used by ten middle school general music teachers deemed "exemplary." The purpose of this study was to better understand what pedagogical tools make for a successful general music teacher of young adolescents. After analyzing hours of videotaped lessons from participating teachers, Curtis found that the most common actions amongst these successful general music teachers were eye contact, hand gestures, and movement. Curtis concluded his study by saying that while all teachers in the study were considered successful at teaching middle level general music, the behaviors and actions used by the teachers were quite different.

In a similar study, Coleman (2013) investigated the instructional methods of ten middle school general music teachers, both novice and experienced. Coleman sought to understand how teachers' classroom practice aligned with Bloom's taxonomy and the National Standards for

Music Education. Findings from this study indicated a need for purposeful teaching linked to assessment. The study also suggested that integrated lessons and units facilitate meta-cognitive thinking in middle school students.

In 1992, Duling investigated the pedagogical content knowledge of two middle school general music teachers considered “exemplary.” Duling’s study examined the curricular content and pedagogical techniques implemented by the participating teachers and then attempted to understand the source of this knowledge and ability as well as the impact of each teacher’s school environment on his/her general music classroom. Duling identified one participant as viewing her general music curriculum and pedagogy through a social perspective, emphasizing student interactions and participation over content, a perspective heavily influenced by this teacher’s personal motivation as a teacher and musician. For the second participant, Duling identified the teacher as focused on students having a positive experience with music, a perspective this participant cultivated through his personal organizational skills. From these two cases, Duling put forward a theoretical model of “the social mediation theory in general music teaching,” but did not suggest that this model was applicable to teachers beyond these two participants.

### **Music Teachers’ Opinions**

In music, the literature on teacher opinions, beliefs, or attitudes is often focused on a particular music discipline because each has its own unique concerns. For example, researchers have investigated the specific beliefs of string music teachers on selected topics, such as teaching tuning (Hopkins, 2013; Lo, 2013), as well as the opinions of band directors regarding successful music teaching (Miksza, Roeder, & Biggs, 2010). A number of studies investigated preservice educators’ perspectives, such as their opinions toward an instrumental methods course

(Teachout, 2004) or their opinions regarding what is needed to be a good music teacher (Davis, 2006). Like the broader literature in education, many studies in the music education literature investigated teachers' perceptions or attitudes toward the inclusion of diverse student populations into the music classroom (Hourigan, 2009; Davlia, 2013). Both Hourigan (2009) and Davlia (2013) demonstrated that preservice teachers' thoughts regarding including students with disabilities in the music classroom could be changed over time, given specified preparation.

Investigations of general music teachers' opinions focus primarily on *elementary* general music. The topics investigated in these studies are as wide-ranging as the comprehensive musical content that defines general music. While by no means an exhaustive list of examples, four dissertations serve to demonstrate the diversity of topics on which general music teachers' attitudes are investigated. Petersen (2005) surveyed elementary music teachers in Arizona regarding their use of multicultural music in general music. Petersen found that life experiences had an impact on music teachers' willingness to and comfort in using multicultural music in the classroom. Kellermeyer (2009) surveyed elementary music teachers' beliefs and discussed the relationship between those beliefs and the likelihood of job related burnout or retention. She found that positive attitudes toward administration and the school community were related to high job satisfaction and retention among elementary general music teachers (Kellermeyer, 2009). Kelly-McHale (2011) conducted case studies with an elementary music teacher and four of the teacher's second-generation students. She examined the connection between the music teacher's curricular beliefs and pedagogical practices, particularly culturally responsive pedagogy, and the identity formation of these immigrant students (Kelly-McHale, 2011). Shouldice (2013) conducted an in-depth case study of one elementary general music teacher who believed that all children are musical. Shouldice sought to understand the nature of this teacher's

beliefs and the impact of these beliefs on the classroom learning environment. According to Shouldice, a teacher's beliefs about students' musical talent or ability are directly related to the choices the teacher makes in the classroom.

Only two dissertation studies focused on music teacher opinions included middle level general music teachers as subjects in a larger population (Jenkins, 2012; Niknafs, 2013). Jenkins (2012) surveyed K-12 music teachers in Chicago Public Schools about interdisciplinary teaching. Jenkins found that teachers in her study "enjoy teaching interdisciplinary music curricula, agree that this type of teaching is important, and believe that each subject included should have an equal amount of time for exploration" (2012, p. 145). Niknafs' (2013) dissertation investigated Illinois music teacher beliefs regarding the inclusion of improvisation in the K-8 general music curriculum. According to Niknafs, teachers in this study "believe that improvisation is important, appropriate for students to learn, invaluable for them to be engaged in music, and an integral part of a holistic music education;" however, she also found that teachers who do not specialize in general music are less likely to use improvisation in their curriculum (2013, p. 178).

Five studies on teacher opinions specifically focus on middle level music teachers teaching specific music classes (Barrett, 2015; Hopkins, 2013; O'Donnell, 2010; Rapp, 2009; Young, 2002). First, Hopkins (2013) surveyed middle school string teachers about young adolescents' abilities to independently tune and found that teachers felt the biggest barrier was the amount of course time required to develop student tuning skills. Second, Rapp (2009) investigated choral directors' attitudes toward parental involvement in middle school chorus. Third, Young (2002) sought to understand what music teachers (in band, choir, and general music) believed about music education at the middle school level. This grounded theory study found that "middle level music educators' strategies for teaching are shaped by their personal

philosophies of music education, which are based on their value of the importance of music as an essential component for living and their belief in the importance of music education in the lives of students” (p. 183). This study did not find that the teaching of young adolescents was a particularly important driving force for the middle school music teacher participants, rather love of music and the importance of music education took precedence over the age group taught.

Fourth, Barrett (2015) investigated the beliefs that guided a fifth and sixth grade general music teacher in her practice. This study examined the participant’s articulation of what she believed as an educator and the implementation of these beliefs through work with students on a school-wide project called *Extravaganza*. Barrett found that this teacher grounds her teaching philosophy on the developmental needs of students or what she describes as “to think in the perspective of each child” (p. 153). Descriptions from the classroom show a teacher who guides students as they work in groups, often allowing students to collaborate without interruption, but stepping in when needed. Barrett connects these philosophical beliefs of the teacher to the progressive and democratic educational ideals of Dewey. Though not mentioned explicitly, this teacher’s articulation of her teaching philosophy also connects directly to the foundational principles of the middle level concept, particularly the concept of structuring learning around students’ developmental needs.

Finally, O’Donnell (2010) investigated the views of seven music teachers (all in the same district) on the integration of math content into the music curriculum. O’Donnell then devised a curriculum guide for the district to enable music teachers to better utilize mathematical concepts as part of the music curriculum. While not addressed by the author, this study directly connects music learning to an aspect of the middle level concept: integrative curriculum.



In this section, I have reviewed the existing empirical literature in middle level general music organized into four primary categories: the students, the curriculum and pedagogy, the teachers, and teacher opinions. According to a series of published literature reviews in music education (Draves, Cruse, Mills, & Sweet, 2008; Ebie, 2002; Kratus, 1992; Sink, 1992) reviewing the literature from 1953 through 2005, the number of published studies focused on middle level general music learners, teachers, or classes decreased each decade, while simultaneously the middle level concept was being developed, implemented, and gained a prominent place in US schooling. This inverse relationship raises questions regarding the sensitivity of music education research to the changing climate within the broader field of curriculum and instruction, specifically regarding the education of young adolescents.

According to Ebie's (2002) study that examined the first fifty years of articles published in *Journal of Research in Music Education*,

Research samples specifically drawn from middle or junior high schools revealed 31 samples from middle schools and 58 samples from junior high schools. These numbers seem small when compared to 212 elementary samples and 104 high school samples. . . . The middle school concept places importance on exploration and the opportunity for more electives courses to be taken. The availability of music education to students in Grades 6 through 8 as well as teaching and study of music at the middle school level is an area in need of more research. (p. 290)

While the music education practitioner literature (see also Bawel, 1992; Davis, 2011; Gerber, 1992; Gerrity, 2009; Hinckley, 1994; Kimpton, 1994; Metz, 1980; Stauffer, 1994) is rich in discussions about the middle level concept's implications for general music, the literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that the middle level concept is not a primary focus of

those investigating general music for young adolescents. Some of the middle level general music empirical research hints at the importance of middle level curriculum and pedagogy; however, none of the scholars discussed above make an explicit connection to the middle level concept. In the next section, I discuss the few studies that integrate the middle level concept into music education or integrate the arts into middle level education.

### **The Problem**

Middle level education and music education at the middle level are two parallel tracks in educational research, theory, and practice. Researchers and educators in middle level education focus on young adolescent development, talk about integrated curriculum, and value arts learning as part of the total development of young adolescents. Meanwhile, music educators and researchers focus on developing musicianship in young adolescents, raise concerns over the developmental appropriateness of beginning instrumental study or singing with a changing voice, and wonder how best to engage young adolescents uninterested in musical study. While typically mutually exclusive, these two disciplines are not at odds; rather, they are simply working at the problem within an entirely different sub-discipline of education. In this section I briefly discuss how music and the arts are integrated into the discourse in middle level education and then discuss how music educators integrate young adolescent development and other aspects of the middle level concept into their discourse.

### **Where are the Arts in Middle Level Education?**

Music and visual art are the most common art forms taught in public middle schools (McEwin & Greene, 2011; Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). In this section, I briefly discuss the limited data on the teaching of arts curriculum in middle schools, discuss arts learning in middle

level interdisciplinary team planning, and finally explore the literature on middle level specific teacher preparation.

**Arts Curriculum in Middle Schools.** While defined as a “core academic subject” by the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, the arts are often not seen as equivalent to subjects such as literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign languages (AEP, 2004). *This We Believe* states that young adolescents:

need, for instance, the chance to conduct science experiments, though they may never work in a lab, to be a member of a musical group, though never to become a professional musician, to write in multiple formats, though never to publish professionally, to have a part in a play, though never to become a paid actor, to play on a team, though never to become a career athlete, or to create visual images through drawing and painting, though never to become an artist. (NMSA, 2010)

Despite this national support for arts learning for young adolescents, little data exist regarding arts learning in middle level schools. The most recent statistics on arts learning come from the National Center for Educational Statistics, which reports data on arts instruction throughout the United States, but provides no specific data on arts learning at the middle level<sup>7</sup> (Table 2.1).

McEwin and Greene (2011) reported that in surveyed public middle schools, visual art was required for 28% of eighth graders and 44% of sixth graders in 2009. Industrial arts were offered by less than 25% of schools at any grade (5-8) and theatre and dance were not reported (McEwin & Greene, 2011). In 2009, general music was required at grades 6-8 by less than 50% of middle

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<sup>7</sup>According to the data analysis details provided by Parsad and Spiegelman:

A school was defined as an elementary school if the lowest grade was lower than or equal to grade 6 and the highest grade was lower than or equal to grade 8. A secondary school was defined as having a lowest grade of 7 or greater and a highest grade equal to or greater than grade 7. Combined schools were defined as those having grades higher than grade 8 and lower than grade 7. (2012, p. A-1)

This approach to analysis places data on schools serving grades 5-8 (middle level schools) within the data reported for both secondary and elementary schools.

schools surveyed; however, for elective options, 97% of middle schools surveyed offered band, 68% offered chorus, 48% offered visual art, 36% offered orchestra, and 29% offered general

Table 2.1

*Percentage of Public Schools Offering Dance, Music, Theatre, and Visual Art*

Arts Discipline <i>Data Collection School Year</i>	Secondary <sup>1</sup> <i>2008-2009</i>	Elementary <i>2009-2010</i>
Dance	12%	3%
Music	91%	94%
Theatre	45%	4%
Visual Arts	89%	83%

<sup>1</sup>Data for grades 5-8 is included in both secondary and elementary depending on school community (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012).

music (McEwin & Greene, 2011). More specific details regarding content or quality of these arts learning courses is not available. While researchers who study middle level education, like McEwin and Greene, make recommendations that encourage providing middle level students “a rich selection of required non-core and elective subjects” (2011, p. 54), only a limited amount of data exist to determine how much arts education is provided to young adolescents, in what forms, and by whom.

**Interdisciplinary Teams and Integrated Units.** Interdisciplinary teams are an important structure in many middle schools, both for planning and implementing cross-curricular learning and for creating smaller communities within a larger school. As was mentioned previously, arts teachers are typically excluded (due to scheduling) from the interdisciplinary teams that structure many middle schools. Because arts teachers are not typically involved in interdisciplinary teams, most of the middle level integrated curriculum literature focuses on the

integration of the four “core” subject areas (Alexander, 2001; D. F. Brown, 2011; Dowden, 2007; Pate & Nesin, 2011; Springer, 2013; Virtue, 2007b). In addition, this exclusion sometimes leads to the isolation of arts teachers from the important work of integrated curriculum; however, a few empirical studies in middle level education demonstrate the value of the arts to middle level integrated curriculum (Bailey, 2003; Bolak, Bialach, & Dunphy, 2005; Carlisle, 2011; Lorimer, 2007).

Bailey (2003) worked with other middle level teachers to create a unit of study instigated by one of the school’s visual art teachers. The designed unit of study focused on archeology, involved all of the “core” teachers in addition to several arts specialists, and allowed students to participate in the planning. Bailey investigated how this unit met the standards and how students perceived this unit of study across disciplines. She found that standards were met, the curriculum was effective, and that involving students in planning “helps to develop critical thinking, shows students that their ideas are valued, and allows them to embrace serious concerns for education in our society” (p. 8). Though this inquiry investigated an interdisciplinary unit of study involving arts teachers, the emphasis of the investigation was not on the arts learning or curriculum.

In 2011, Carlisle investigated a performing arts curriculum integration program designed specifically for middle level students. This project, called INSPIRE, did not involve “core” curriculum subjects, but rather integrated the music, theater, and dance into a project-based unit. The project-based curriculum, created from student-developed questions (a direct connection to *This We Believe* characteristic three, relevant curriculum), was designed to develop 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Three themes emerged from this study: 1) the importance of integration, 2) the challenges faced by students, and 3) how students discussed their experience with the unit. According to the

author, “arts-focused curriculum integration is a viable approach for developing Partnership for Twenty-First Century skills within the performing arts” (p. 232).

In her dissertation study, Lorimer (2007) examined the use of interdisciplinary art forms (visual and performing) in the teaching of social studies, language arts, math, and science at eight middle level schools in California. The focus of this study was on visual art and music as pedagogical tools for learning in “core” subjects. She concluded that interdisciplinary arts lessons create meaningful, relevant learning environments that are valuable to young adolescent learning. She also suggested that interdisciplinary work in the arts requires teacher training, planning, and consideration of student developmental and personal needs. It is important to note that the art instruction itself was not evaluated and only two arts teachers were participants in this study.

In a 2005 study (Bolak, Bialach, & Dunphy), administrators and teachers recounted the process of collaboratively developing a thematic arts-integrated unit using Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences as a guiding framework. The focus of this school’s work was to develop a world cultures curriculum that would make the curriculum more relevant to the diverse student population at their school. Piloted first with fifty-one sixth graders, the outcome of this unit demonstrated higher test scores for participating students. According to the authors, “designing and implementing a program that integrates the arts with the core academic curriculum demonstrates that it is possible to energize teachers to provide instruction that engages students, keeps them excited, and keeps them learning” (p. 19). In alignment with middle level philosophy, the work of these educators served to integrate subjects, made curriculum relevant to students, encouraged higher order thinking, and assessed students authentically. Of importance in this study is that the middle school music, visual art, and physical education teachers, along

with a high school theatre teacher, were actively involved in all aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

**Middle Level Preservice Preparation.** Arts teachers are often overlooked when middle level research questions, such as specific teacher preparation in young adolescent development, are investigated. In their recent survey of public middle schools, McEwin and Greene found that at 70% of schools, about half of the “core” teachers had received some middle level preparation, yet “only 11% of schools had more than 80% of core teachers with a separate middle level certification” (2011, p. 23). Focusing only on core teachers, this finding raises questions regarding the middle level preparation/certification of “specialist” teachers. Whether or not music or any specialist teacher is prepared or certified in middle level education is beyond the scope of their study. In addition, those studies discussed above under *This We Believe* characteristic one focused on the preservice preparation of “core” teachers, commonly educated in colleges of education-based programs, while music and visual art teachers are educated primarily within their arts discipline. Successful implementation of the middle level concept is a constant process requiring the collaboration, implementation, reflection, and revision work of teaching by all teachers in a school community, a process best conducted when all teachers are specifically prepared for working with middle level students. However, the preservice preparation of arts teachers in the middle level concept does not appear to be a question investigated by the middle level community.

In this section, I briefly overviewed the ways in which arts educators and arts curriculum are included or excluded from discourse in middle level education. Although a few studies do exist, they are written primarily from non-arts perspectives. While the arts are valued as part of a

total education for young adolescents, most of the discourse in middle level education excludes arts learning and arts teachers.

### **How does the Middle Level Concept Impact Music Education?**

In this section, I discuss how aspects of the middle level concept are utilized in the music education literature. First, I discuss the aspects of young adolescent development investigated in scholarship. Afterward, I discuss literature within music education broadly that specifically utilizes the middle level concept.

**Young Adolescent Development in Music Education.** Although the language of the middle level concept is not always used, young adolescent physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development are topics examined in music education. For example, a few studies focused on young adolescent student identity and motivation for participation in music (Bennetts, 2013; Campbell, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Power, 2008; Saunders, 2010; Warnock, 2009). Other studies examined the use of varied curricular or pedagogical techniques such as composition (Koops, 2009; Riley, 2006) or the implementation of student reflection (Reynolds & Beitler, 2007) into the ensemble curriculum.

One of the major ways that the field of music education focuses on young adolescent development is through discussions of vocal development during puberty. This aspect of young adolescent development greatly impacts the research literature in choral music education (Gackle, 1991; 2006; Kennedy, 2004; Killian, 1999; Sweet, 2015). While vocal health and development relate to the physical changes undergone by both male and female young adolescents, these physical changes are also discussed in terms of psychological and social issues faced by young choral singers. The vocal development of both male and female students during young adolescence also impacts scholarship regarding gender participation in choir (Freer, 2010;



Lucas, 2011; Sweet, 2010) and questions regarding gender separation of choral ensembles (Zemek, 2010).

**Use of the Middle Level Concept in Music Education.** Studies in music education specifically utilizing the language and tenets of the middle level concept are rare. Five studies explicitly integrate aspects of the middle level concept into a music education-focused empirical work. Cain (2002) connected middle level philosophy to the use of technology in music education in an undergraduate honors thesis, and Hamann (2007) found that middle school choir directors were largely excluded from the interdisciplinary teams at their middle schools. While they address aspects of the middle level concept, the two studies above do not specifically address learning in middle school general music. In the remainder of this section I discuss three music education dissertations that specifically utilize the middle level concept in a study that includes general music.

Musoleno (1990) surveyed adolescent development, middle level, and music education experts in order to devise a list of criteria for an ideal middle level music curriculum. He then surveyed over one hundred music programs to determine whether existing programs aligned with the ideas of experts. Though his dissertation focused on the total music program, Musoleno found that “general music was the required course of choice for middle grades schools” (p. 131). Of particular interest to the present study is that Musoleno drew upon concepts in middle level education such as exploratory courses, “core” course offerings, and interdisciplinary curriculum as part of his survey; however, he did not specifically discuss these concepts or the total music program in terms of young adolescent developmental needs. In his conclusion, Musoleno provided a list of twelve essential elements for a middle school music program, three of which specifically discussed general music: 1) general music should be the required music course, 2)

general music should be taught as part of the exploratory wheel, and 3) general music should receive between two and three hours of class per week.

Poor's (1999) dissertation study of thirty middle school music programs links music instruction in these schools directly to aspects of the middle level concept. While Poor found some elements of the middle level concept, such as active engaged learning, higher order questioning, multi-grade classes, and advisories present in the programs examined, he also found a lack of interdisciplinary instruction, music education limited to a small population of the school, teacher-centered instruction, and limited group work practices in conflict with middle level philosophy. Poor's study focused on the total music program at each school and included a limited number of general music classes. He found that when compared with ensemble classes, general music classes "showed greater diversity in method of instruction and instructional objective through creative projects, interdisciplinary instruction, and cooperative learning strategies" (p. 157). However, Poor also found that only eight of the thirty examined schools required music education of any kind and six of those eight schools had sixth grade general music as the only requirement.

In a dissertation study early in the middle school transition, Hinton (1978) drew upon the early writings of middle level philosophers and experts in adolescent development to design a curriculum sequence for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade general music. Hinton united music education philosophy and middle level philosophy in order to state six characteristics of middle school general music that guided his study: 1) development of aesthetic potential, 2) required of all students in all three grades, 3) broad musical content, 4) objectives guide the curriculum, 5) young adolescent developmental needs and interests dictate the pedagogy employed and curricular focus should be on listening, performing, and creating, and 6) general music

curriculum and pedagogy must change based on student needs. After consulting with music education experts and visiting several schools, Hinton developed a curriculum model for middle level general music. One important feature of this model is that Hinton provided general music strategies, organizational techniques, and equipment recommendations aligned to young adolescent developmental characteristics, not only physical, but also cognitive, emotional, and social.

While Musoleno (1990) and Poor (1999) drew upon the middle level concept to discuss music education at the middle school, general music is only one part of their larger investigation. Hinton's (1978) is the only study that directly connected the middle level concept to a study exclusively focused on the teaching of general music to young adolescents, yet this study is over thirty years old. While a number of music education practitioner articles since the publication of Hinton's study specifically integrated ideas from the middle level concept into middle level general music, for example: curricular suggestions based on young adolescent needs (Davis, 2011; Gerber, 1992; Gerrity, 2009; McAnally, 2009; McAnally, 2011; McCoy, 2012) or suggestions for teachers about working within middle school structures (Giebelhausen, 2015; Moore, 1994; Moore, 1997; Reynolds & Moore, 1991; Stauffer & Saunders, 1992), I found no other empirical study specifically focusing on general music and the middle level concept.

### **Research Questions**

To recapitulate, two parallel and typically unconnected tracks of educational research, middle level education and general music at the middle level were examined in this chapter. The limited studies connecting the middle level concept and music education as well as those integrating arts education into middle level education studies were also briefly discussed. The absence of more studies connecting the two tracks in education research signals a lack of

communication across disciplinary lines and a missed opportunity for developing richer lenses for study in both fields, interdisciplinary communication supported by the previous work of Lipstiz (1977) in middle level education and Detels (1999) in arts education. These two disciplines might be brought together in a variety of ways, depending on the research questions asked. This study aims to do so through an examination of middle level general music through the lens of the middle level concept.

Using the five principles of curriculum, instruction, and assessment stated in *This We Believe*, this mixed methods inquiry specifically investigates how music teachers throughout the United States conceptualize and carry out general music for young adolescents. The three research questions investigated are:

- **RQ1:** How and to what extent are middle level music teachers' beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with *This We Believe*?
- **RQ2:** How and to what extent are music teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement?
- **RQ3:** How do philosophical beliefs and lived experience influence the design of a middle level general music course?

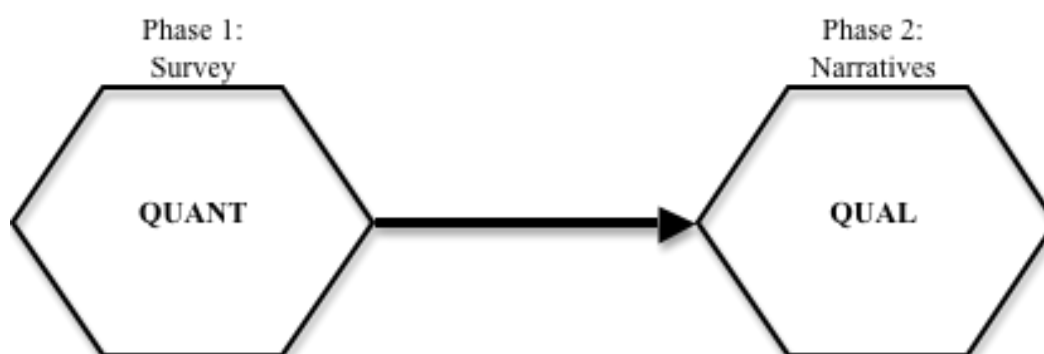
In the next chapter, I discuss the mixed methods research design of my study.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The overarching framework for this mixed methods study was an iterative integrated design in which phase one (survey) was used to develop phase two (narratives) in a sequential format (Greene, 2007). In integrated designs “methods *intentionally* [emphasis added] interact with one another” (Greene, 2007, p. 125). While intentional interaction can occur for several different purposes, in this case the primary purpose was iterative or developmental, meaning that one method is used to develop the next in a sequential format (Greene, 2007). In this case, the four narrative participants were selected from the survey respondent population and focal topics for the narratives were derived from survey analysis (see Figure 3.1). In this way, the study moved from general (the literature), to national (the survey), to local/individual (the narratives of experience). Developing one method from the other situated the qualitative portion within a national understanding of music teachers’ perceptions of middle level general music.

Figure 3.1

*Phases of the research design*<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup>In much of the mixed methods design literature, the use of arrows denotes phases of the study implemented sequentially (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition, a labeling language using upper and lowercase letters represents the relative weight of each phase; in this case, two large phases of equal weight are denoted by capital letters QUAL and QUANT (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). These symbols, common to mixed methods design, are used in the figures in this chapter to aid comprehension and to situate this study within the mixed methods literature.

The choice of these two methodologies was drawn specifically from the literature on teacher opinions in both middle level education and music education. Many of the studies within both disciplines (Jenkins, 2012; Kellermeier, 2009; Morgan-Conner, 1995; Petersen, 2005; Updegraff, 2011) utilize survey methods to obtain information regarding teachers' opinions and beliefs. However, a number of studies on teacher beliefs also use qualitative methods to understand teacher opinions, how these change over time, and their impact on curriculum implementation (Best-Laimit, 1985, Conklin, 2007; Davila, 2013; Hartin, 1994; Hourigan, 2009; Shouldice, 2013; Thornton, 2013). In this way, teacher opinions and ideas about middle level general music were collected at a single point in time via reports on the survey and also investigated experientially through their classroom practice and their stories of lived experience.

In addition, these two methods were selected for the mixed methods purpose of complementarity. According to Greene, studies mixed for purposes of complementarity use “results from the different methods [to] elaborate, enhance, deepen, and broaden the overall interpretations and inferences from the study” (2007, p. 101). Collecting the narratives of experience as a second phase allowed the contextual details of the lived experience to offer explanations of and humanize the statistical data gleaned from the survey. Examination from two perspectives, one broad and national, the other narrow and local, provided a unique complementarity of perspectives on this issue.

As stated previously, this study investigates the following research questions: **RQ1)** How and to what extent are middle level music teachers' beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with *This We Believe*? **RQ2)** How and to what extent are music teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations,

professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement? **RQ3**) How do philosophical beliefs and lived experience influence the design of a middle level general music course?

### **Phase 1: Survey**

Phase one of this study was the development, piloting, and implementation of a nationwide, descriptive, self-administered, one-time survey, using the online platform Survey Gizmo as the mode of administration. This survey (Appendix A) was conducted and analyzed through a realist/post-positivist paradigmatic perspective in alignment with survey methodology. A one-time descriptive questionnaire, the researcher-designed Middle Level General Music Measure (MLGMM), was an important starting point for establishing baseline knowledge regarding the congruence of middle school music teachers' beliefs to *This We Believe* (RQ1). In addition, by asking the question "to what extent are your ideas about curriculum/pedagogy a result of the following experiences," the data collected began to reveal the most influential components of a music teacher's lived experience (RQ2).

#### **Survey Development: Validity and Reliability**

Construct definition, expert review, cognitive interviews, and a pilot survey were all tools employed prior to the distribution of the national survey. First, constructs and evolving items were peer reviewed by knowledgeable survey designers over the course of a semester through a multi-step revision process. Second, two cognitive interviews were conducted with local music educators. This process involved the music educator taking the survey and thinking aloud as she answered the questions (Presser et. al, 2004). These cognitive interviews led to small refinements of item stems and item response options. These interviews also confirmed that the target audience easily comprehended most items. Following the cognitive interviews, the

questionnaire was transferred to the online survey system, SurveyGizmo.com. Five music educators from across the country reviewed the online questionnaire to test the online survey functionality and provide feedback on questions and answer options. The pilot MLGMM, comprised of sixty-six structured response items, nine demographic items, and two open-ended questions, was then finalized for pilot distribution (see Appendix B). In this case, the collection of pilot survey data and its subsequent analysis allowed for testing of internal consistency, a measure of reliability (Trochim, 2006).

**Pilot Survey Distribution.** The MLGMM was piloted in May 2014 with a population of 1,644 middle school music educators belonging to the Illinois Music Education Association (IMEA). The pilot survey was electronically distributed by the president of IMEA. Two weeks later a reminder was sent, again by the IMEA president. In total, 311 (19%) music educators accessed the online questionnaire; however, 111 respondents did not consent to the IRB, and therefore did not access any of the questionnaire items. Total respondents on particular items varied from 200 (12%) to 165 (10%). In accordance with IRB, no question was required and respondents could stop answering the survey at any time. Total response rate for this survey was approximately ten percent.

**Pilot Survey Analysis.** Pilot analysis revealed that most 2013-2014 Illinois middle school music teachers (80%) were unfamiliar with *This We Believe*. However, when examining the adherence to various *This We Believe* principles included in the survey, little statistical difference existed between those familiar and unfamiliar with *This We Believe*. Exploratory factor analysis (using principal-component factor analysis in STATA) revealed that those variables ( $n = 163$ ,  $KMO = 0.85$ ) derived from the five *This We Believe* characteristics of curriculum, instruction, and assessment ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) factored into categories nearly identical to the



five characteristics from *This We Believe* articulated in the theoretical framework. Only one variable did not load  $> 0.5$  on any factor (see Appendix C). Again, the size of the pilot data set is limiting; however, completing this pilot analysis further strengthened the reliability of the MLGMM.

Coding of the open-ended responses revealed important information and also proved instructive in revising these two questions. Responses to the open-ended questions were coded based on their relevance to one of the five characteristics of *This We Believe* (RQ1). For example, the following response, “I created much of my curriculum based on the desires of the students” (Pilot Survey Respondent 220), was coded as TWB3 to represent characteristic three. Responses were also coded for their discussion of a music teacher’s lived experience (RQ2), for example: “I started [developing curriculum] with my most knowledgeable area, pre-designed curriculum (during courses in undergrad), workshops attended, and student interest” (Pilot Survey Respondent 259). Other responses from this pilot also indicate that music teachers were eager to discuss their middle level general music curriculum: “I appreciate a survey being done about Middle School General Music, as I feel that many times it is forgotten” (Pilot Survey Respondent 218), indicating a need for the national survey. There were also respondents who found the open-ended questions confusing or responded similarly to both questions, indicating a need for revision of the open-ended questions.

**MLGMM Revisions.** The analysis of the pilot survey indicated important changes to improve the measure. Primarily, question stems were revised and items reordered so that the survey more clearly addressed the five principles of *This We Believe* and more coherently separated curriculum content from pedagogy and teacher actions from guiding principles. In addition, demographic questions were presented at the beginning of the survey so that questions

pertaining to all middle level music teachers could be answered first and thus those who had never taught middle level general music would be excused (using survey logic) from answering questions for which they had no experience. The open-ended questions were also revised for clarity. These revisions resulted in sixty-eight structured response items, nine demographic questions (two containing logic to prevent certain respondents from continuing with the survey), and two open-ended questions (see Appendix A). Only those teachers currently teaching middle level general music during 2014-2015 were administered the two open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were only used in the narrative participant selection process (see below). For a complete review of the changes made to the MLGMM, please see Appendix D.

### **Population and Data Collection**

Using the National Association for Music Education's (NAfME) researcher electronic mailing list options, the national survey was distributed electronically to music teachers throughout the United States. Distribution of the national survey began via e-mail on October 17, 2014 through the NAfME listserv (see Appendix E). A reminder email (see Appendix F) was then distributed on October 30, 2014, and the survey closed on November 13, 2014. All survey responses were collected through SurveyGizmo.com.

**Population.** The target population for the national survey was practicing middle level music educators in the United States. The sampling frame was middle level music educators belonging to the NAfME, specifically members self-identifying (through their NAfME membership registration) as middle school/junior high teachers. Based on the response rate and analysis of the pilot, I hoped to obtain at least 1,000 responses by sending the email to 10,000 members of the population. This is the population I requested of NAfME; however, NAfME sent the survey to the entire population rather than randomly selecting 10,000 names. As a

consequence, all NAFME members self-identifying as middle school teachers on their membership form received an email invitation to participate in the survey ( $N = 15,926$ ) through the NAFME email system, and the survey was distributed to the entire population rather than a sample of the population.

**Response Rate.** The response rate for the national survey was 8.5%. A total of 1,445 respondents accessed the survey yielding, after data cleaning, 1,369 useable responses. While this 8.5% response rate is low, according to a study conducted by Sheehan (2001), response rates for email-based surveys have fallen each decade, from 61.5% in 1986 to 24.0% in 2000.

Although current data does not exist, one might assume even lower response rates for email surveys in 2014. In a 2008 meta-analysis, Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Hass, and Vehovar found that published studies using web-based surveys have an 11% lower response rate than survey studies using other modes of instrument distribution. While researchers have found that combining e-mail or web-based surveys with paper surveys resulted in a much higher response rate (Millar & Dillman, 2011), NAFME does not provide researchers with access to mailing lists nor does the organization allow researchers to access the email list directly, which would allow the researcher to follow-up more directly with non-responders. Due to the nature of this instrument distribution, I did not have access to the mailing list and cannot confirm that each email address used by NAFME was unique or in working order.

**Wave Analysis.** Given the low response rate, wave analysis was conducted on the respondent population in order to compare those who responded before ( $n = 835$ ) and after ( $n = 534$ ) the reminder email. According to Kano and colleagues, wave analysis assumes “that late respondents ... share characteristics with nonrespondents” and could thus be compared to those who respond early to the survey to determine if substantial statistical differences exist (Kano,

Franke, Afifi, & Bourque, 2008, p. 481). If substantial differences exist between early and late responders, survey researchers must evaluate whether or not the survey results accurately assess the entire population investigated. While Kano and colleagues (2008) suggest several other tests to assess whether respondents represent the full population, based on the data available, wave analysis is the only test possible.

Wave analysis (Table 3.1) was conducted using an independent group t-test method for seven demographic variables and eleven additive composite variables (see Chapter 4 for more details). This analysis assumed that those who responded after the email reminder were more similar to the non-respondent population than to those who responded initially. There was a significant statistical difference, at the 95% confidence interval, in the scores for the early responders and late responders on only three variables. First, for years teaching, there was a small significant difference between early responders ( $M = 9.53$ ,  $SD = 9.23$ ) and late responders ( $M = 10.79$ ,  $SD = 9.45$ );  $t(1359) = -2.44$ ,  $p = 0.02$ . While one might expect that any two groups of teachers might contain teachers with differing years of experience, the two groups are actually remarkably similar with a larger number of teachers in both groups who are in the first ten years of their career, with the numbers diminishing significantly after year 15. However, the statistical difference appears to be due to the fact that the early responder group contains far more teachers reporting less than two years of teaching experience. The other two variables with a statistically significant difference between the two groups were the composite variable focused on teacher musical engagement  $t(563.104) = -2.12$ ,  $p = 0.03$  and the variable assessing a teacher's awareness of the *TWB* document  $t(630.875) = 2.23$ ,  $p = 0.03$ . In these three significant tests, the means overlap at the 95% confidence interval, thus suggesting that the differences between early responders and late responders is small.

Table 3.1

*Independent group t-tests for Early and Late Survey Responders*

Variable	Late Responder	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Pr(  <i>T</i>  >  <i>t</i>  )																																																																																																																																																																																																								
Years Teaching	No	830	9.53	9.23	-2.4357	1359	0.0150																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	531	10.79	9.45				Bachelor Degree Leading to Certification	No	828	0.87	0.34	0.9682	1356	0.3331	Yes	530	0.85	0.36	Ever Taught Middle School General Music	No	801	0.64	0.48	0.8728	1311	0.3829	Yes	512	0.62	0.49	<i>TWB</i> Awareness <sup>1</sup>	No	441	0.11	0.31	2.2289	630.875	0.0262	Yes	251	0.06	0.24	Currently Teaching Middle Level General Music	No	441	0.62	0.49	0.5081	689	0.6116	Yes	250	0.60	0.49	See-Self General Music Teacher	No	829	0.19	0.39	0.6220	1359	0.5341	Yes	532	0.17	0.38	Preferred Grade Middle School	No	826	0.52	0.50	0.2164	1354	0.8287	Yes	530	0.52	0.50	Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882	Yes	245	2.93	0.84	Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644
Bachelor Degree Leading to Certification	No	828	0.87	0.34	0.9682	1356	0.3331																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	530	0.85	0.36				Ever Taught Middle School General Music	No	801	0.64	0.48	0.8728	1311	0.3829	Yes	512	0.62	0.49	<i>TWB</i> Awareness <sup>1</sup>	No	441	0.11	0.31	2.2289	630.875	0.0262	Yes	251	0.06	0.24	Currently Teaching Middle Level General Music	No	441	0.62	0.49	0.5081	689	0.6116	Yes	250	0.60	0.49	See-Self General Music Teacher	No	829	0.19	0.39	0.6220	1359	0.5341	Yes	532	0.17	0.38	Preferred Grade Middle School	No	826	0.52	0.50	0.2164	1354	0.8287	Yes	530	0.52	0.50	Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882	Yes	245	2.93	0.84	Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86								
Ever Taught Middle School General Music	No	801	0.64	0.48	0.8728	1311	0.3829																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	512	0.62	0.49				<i>TWB</i> Awareness <sup>1</sup>	No	441	0.11	0.31	2.2289	630.875	0.0262	Yes	251	0.06	0.24	Currently Teaching Middle Level General Music	No	441	0.62	0.49	0.5081	689	0.6116	Yes	250	0.60	0.49	See-Self General Music Teacher	No	829	0.19	0.39	0.6220	1359	0.5341	Yes	532	0.17	0.38	Preferred Grade Middle School	No	826	0.52	0.50	0.2164	1354	0.8287	Yes	530	0.52	0.50	Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882	Yes	245	2.93	0.84	Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																				
<i>TWB</i> Awareness <sup>1</sup>	No	441	0.11	0.31	2.2289	630.875	0.0262																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	251	0.06	0.24				Currently Teaching Middle Level General Music	No	441	0.62	0.49	0.5081	689	0.6116	Yes	250	0.60	0.49	See-Self General Music Teacher	No	829	0.19	0.39	0.6220	1359	0.5341	Yes	532	0.17	0.38	Preferred Grade Middle School	No	826	0.52	0.50	0.2164	1354	0.8287	Yes	530	0.52	0.50	Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882	Yes	245	2.93	0.84	Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																
Currently Teaching Middle Level General Music	No	441	0.62	0.49	0.5081	689	0.6116																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	250	0.60	0.49				See-Self General Music Teacher	No	829	0.19	0.39	0.6220	1359	0.5341	Yes	532	0.17	0.38	Preferred Grade Middle School	No	826	0.52	0.50	0.2164	1354	0.8287	Yes	530	0.52	0.50	Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882	Yes	245	2.93	0.84	Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																												
See-Self General Music Teacher	No	829	0.19	0.39	0.6220	1359	0.5341																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	532	0.17	0.38				Preferred Grade Middle School	No	826	0.52	0.50	0.2164	1354	0.8287	Yes	530	0.52	0.50	Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882	Yes	245	2.93	0.84	Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																								
Preferred Grade Middle School	No	826	0.52	0.50	0.2164	1354	0.8287																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	530	0.52	0.50				Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882	Yes	245	2.93	0.84	Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																				
Preservice Preparation <sup>2</sup>	No	438	3.02	0.83	1.3174	681	0.1882																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	245	2.93	0.84				Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241	Yes	245	2.53	0.77	Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																
Professional Journals <sup>2</sup>	No	432	2.47	0.78	-0.9868	675	0.3241																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	245	2.53	0.77				Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948	Yes	242	3.42	0.63	Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																												
Conversations with Colleagues <sup>2</sup>	No	435	3.43	0.65	-0.0065	675	0.9948																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	242	3.42	0.63				Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099	Yes	241	3.24	0.78	Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																																								
Professional Development <sup>2</sup>	No	434	3.23	0.73	-0.2406	673	0.8099																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	241	3.24	0.78				Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990	Yes	247	3.86	0.35	Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																																																				
Teaching Experience <sup>2</sup>	No	436	3.86	0.37	0.0013	681	0.9990																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	247	3.86	0.35				Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341	Yes	244	3.64	0.55	<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																																																																
Personal Musical Engagement <sup>12</sup>	No	434	3.54	0.63	-2.1246	563.104	0.0341																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	244	3.64	0.55				<i>TWB</i> 1 <sup>2</sup>	No	428	3.68	0.49	0.8137	664	0.4161	Yes	238	3.65	0.52	<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508	Yes	246	3.80	0.73	<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841	Yes	257	3.90	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																																																																												
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<i>TWB</i> 2 <sup>23</sup>	No	441	3.80	0.77	0.0617	685	0.9508																																																																																																																																																																																																								
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<i>TWB</i> 3 <sup>23</sup>	No	456	3.86	0.71	-0.8710	711	0.3841																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	257	3.90	0.67				<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666	Yes	258	3.91	0.67	<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																																																																																																																
<i>TWB</i> 4 <sup>23</sup>	No	448	3.93	0.67	0.2969	704	0.7666																																																																																																																																																																																																								
	Yes	258	3.91	0.67				<i>TWB</i> 5 <sup>2</sup>	No	457	3.29	0.90	-0.0446	710	0.9644	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																																																																																																																												
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	Yes	255	3.29	0.86																																																																																																																																																																																																											

<sup>1</sup> Unequal variances, Satterthwaite's approximation calculated<sup>2</sup> Composite variable; creation process described in Chapter 4<sup>3</sup> Variable standardized,  $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$  and then recoded as described in Chapter 4

These results indicate that those who responded early were statistically younger in their career and were slightly more likely to be aware of the *This We Believe* document, while those who responded late were more likely to be influenced by their own personal musical

engagement. Having started with the assumption that late responders are more similar to the non-respondent population than to early responders, what this wave analysis suggests is that the non-respondent population is fairly similar to those who responded early to the survey. Thus, one might cautiously conclude that respondents to this survey adequately represent the entire population of middle level music teachers belonging to NAFME, despite the low response rate.

### **Confidentiality**

The University of Illinois Institutional Review Board approved the pilot and national survey design for this study (see Appendix G). Survey respondents were asked to provide contact information *only* if they were interested in participating in phase 2 of the study. All survey respondents, including those who provided contact information, were given a random numerical identifier in order to maintain confidentiality. In accordance with IRB procedures, all data were kept on the Illinois secure server, and all participant identifying information were kept separately in a secure file. The informed consent survey letter is available in Appendix H; the pilot survey informed consent letter is available in Appendix I.

### **Survey Analysis**

Analysis of the survey data was conducted using standard statistical procedures and STATA14 software. Following data cleaning and initial descriptive statistics, inferential data analysis began. The focus of analysis was on twenty-eight items, identified *a priori* as aligned with the five characteristics of *This We Believe*. Factor analysis was conducted on these twenty-eight items; however, factor analysis was rejected as a method for creating scales for further analysis. Instead, five scales were created through a composite additive variable process described in Chapter 4. Independent group t-tests examined the relationship between these composite variables and awareness of *This We Believe* (RQ1). In addition, additive variables

were created for the aspects of lived experience investigated on the survey. Cross-tabulations were used to investigate the relationship between respondents' reported Lived Experience and scores on the composite *This We Believe* variables (RQ2). The analysis of this phase of the study directly impacted the selection of narrative participants and the foci of narrative interviews and site visits in phase two.

### **Phase 2: Narratives of Experience**

Phase two of this study focused on collecting, analyzing, and crafting narratives of experience for four practicing middle level general music teachers (RQ1-RQ3). I sought to examine the development and evolution of a teacher's opinions about middle level general music, through his/her stories of lived experience: musical development, teacher preparation, and teacher practice. Narrative inquiry seeks stories of lived experience, told directly by the participant, situated in time and place, and viewed through the interpretivist lens of both the researcher and the eventual readers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Barrett and Stauffer, "what makes an account a narrative inquiry rather than a story is one's willingness not only to look for connection and consonance, but also to recognise that different perspectives, voices, and experiences exist and *can inform*" (2009, p. 2, emphasis in original). These narratives of experience are not intended to be representative of all practicing middle level general music teachers, but rather to present a detailed accounting of the four participating teachers in order to consider similarities and differences. The rich, detailed descriptions of experience that emerge from asking a teacher to share his/her stories of teaching middle level general music illuminated and situated the statistical data collected in the survey.

## **Selection of Participants**

Selection of the four participants was a lengthy, multi-step process beginning with the survey responses. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked whether they were currently teaching a middle level general music course (2014-2015 school year). Those who answered affirmatively were then asked to answer the open-ended questions and asked if they were willing to be contacted for further participation in the research. There were 209 survey respondents willing to be contacted for the second phase of this study. For each survey respondent willing to be contacted ( $n = 209$ ), a one page summary sheet was created. This one page summary included selected demographic questions as well as responses to the two open-ended questions (see example Appendix J).

Using the one-page summary sheet, each of these 209 survey respondents was then sorted and coded in multiple ways. First, using demographic responses from the survey, those who preferred middle school, saw themselves as general music teachers, reported only teaching general music, or reported only teaching middle school general music were identified and coded. Second, all open-ended responses were read and each respondent was ranked. While these initial sorting practices were useful, a more systematic method was needed.

Following the initial sorting activities, a research-question derived rubric was developed. Using ten randomly selected summary sheets, each participant was scored (using the rubric) and the rubric was revised. The second rubric was then tested with an additional eleven randomly selected summary sheets in addition to the first ten. The third revision was then tested with these same twenty-one respondents. The fourth and final revision of the rubric was then tested with a new set of fifteen randomly selected summary sheets. Following the fourth rubric revision, the rubric was deemed worthy for evaluation of all willing respondents. All 209 willing respondents



were then randomly reordered and the finalized rubric (Appendix K) was utilized to score all summary sheets.

Following the evaluation of each summary sheet, scores were used to sort the sheets into groups. All summary sheets scoring under 10 were grouped together and all scores after that were placed in groups of five (11-15, 16-20, 21-25, etc.). Table 3.2 presents the breakdown of summary sheets by score grouping. All scored summary sheets were then labeled with flags indicating specific scores on the rubric including those with two frowns ( $n = 34$ ), those with two smiles ( $n = 15$ ), those with scores greater than or equal to 31 ( $n = 37$ ), and those with “disconfirming evidence” ( $n = 12$ ). Those with high scores, two smiles, and disconfirming evidence ( $n = 41$ ) were read, sorted, and reread until a set of twenty preferred respondents was selected. All forty-one respondents were then reprinted on clean paper and sorted by demographic characteristics such as geography and years teaching (see Tables 3.3 & 3.4). Then, a preferred set of twenty responses was selected. Following the selection of two groups of twenty preferred responses, these two sets were compared. Sixteen respondents appeared on both lists, eight appeared on one of the two lists and seventeen appeared on neither list. The sixteen respondents who appeared on both lists were then sorted again until ten respondents remained. After reviewing these ten respondents, it was discovered that no respondent *exclusively* taught middle level general music. Based on the survey demographics collected,

Table 3.2

*Summary Sheet Scores*

<b>Score Range</b>	0	1-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50
<b># Respondents</b>	11	6	34	42	44	35	21	3	6	7

Table 3.3

*Top 41 Respondents by Demographic Variables*

Demographic Variable	<i>N</i>
Geographic Location	
Mid-Atlantic	1
Midwest	16
Northeast	10
Northwest	5
South	4
Southwest	4
Non Contiguous	1
Years of Teaching Experience	
0-5	16
6-10	7
11-19	9
20+	5

Table 3.4

*Top 41 Respondents by Top-Twenty Preferred Groups*

Demographic Variable	Respondents in Both Groups of 20 ( <i>n</i> =16)	Respondents in one Group of 20 ( <i>n</i> =8)	Respondents in Neither Group of 20 ( <i>n</i> =17)
Aware of TWB			
Respondents Reporting Awareness	1	1	3
Current Position			
Middle School Only	2	5	8
General Music Only	0	1	1
Middle School General Music	0	0	0
Preferred Grade Level			
Elementary	1	3	3
Middle School	10	4	11
High School	4	1	2
Other	1	0	1
See Self As			
Band Director	5	0	3
Choir Director	3	0	5
General Music Teacher	4	7	5
Orchestra Director	1	0	2
Other	3	1	2

only three willing survey respondents *exclusively* taught middle level general music. The decision was made to include two of these three respondents in the list of finalists, for a total of twelve potential narrative participants.

The twelve remaining respondents were invited, via email invitation (see Appendix L), to participate in an initial screening interview in December 2014. Screening interviews were conducted with the ten willing respondents in December 2014 and January 2015, via Skype or telephone, using the protocol in Appendix M. The screening interview protocol was developed in order to understand each teacher's current teaching circumstances and past history in more depth. It was also anticipated that these questions would help determine the kinds of stories and experiences the teacher had to share. Specific geographic locations were unknown until the screening interviews. Based on the rapport developed during these screening interviews, as well as the views and experiences of each participant, four narrative participants with differing views and experiences were selected.

The four selected narrative participants possessed different levels of teaching experience, taught in different school communities, and interpreted general music in a variety of ways (Table 3.5). Rachel taught 7<sup>th</sup> grade general music and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade choir in a rural 7-12 school in a Northeastern state and had been teaching for eight years. Beth was a twelve year veteran, second career music teacher who taught at a K-8 private Catholic school in the Midwest. Sarah taught at a large suburban 7-8 school in the Midwest, had been teaching for eleven years, and exclusively taught 7<sup>th</sup> grade general music and 8<sup>th</sup> grade guitar. Finally, Michael was a fourth year teacher who worked in an urban district in the Northeast and divided his teaching load between two K-8 schools where he taught both K-8 general music and 6-8 choir. As will be revealed later, each of

Table 3.5

*Demographic Overview of Narrative Participants*

	<b>Music Courses Taught (During School Time)</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>School Grade Levels</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>School Community</b>	<b>Preservice Degree</b>
<b>Rachel</b>	General Music (7 <sup>th</sup> ) Chorus (7 <sup>th</sup> girls; 8 <sup>th</sup> mixed) Rock Guitar (9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> )	8	7-12	Public	Rural	Music Education
<b>Beth</b>	General Music (K-8 <sup>th</sup> )	12	K-8	Catholic Independent	Suburban	Music Therapy
<b>Sarah</b>	General Music (7 <sup>th</sup> ) Guitar (8 <sup>th</sup> )	11	7-8	Public	Suburban	Music Education
<b>Michael</b>	General Music (K-7 <sup>th</sup> ) Chorus (6 <sup>th</sup> ; 7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> all mixed)	4	K-8	Public	Urban	Music Education

these four teachers brought unique experiences to the teaching of middle level general music.

Each was selected for the story he or she had to tell.

### **Data Collection**

For each of the four narrative participants, data collection included three interviews (Seidman, 2006) as well as a weeklong classroom observation. The first interview, the screening interview described above, typically lasted between forty minutes to an hour (in December 2014 or January 2015). The second, in-person interview occurred during the weeklong classroom observation on the second to last day of each visit and was approximately forty-five minutes to an hour in length (in February, March, or April 2015). For Sarah, the second interview was split over two days and was consequently longer than the other participants. The third interview was conducted after the participant reviewed a draft of his/her narrative (in August and September 2015) and focused primarily on the participant's reactions to the draft document. All interviews were audio recorded; the first two interviews were fully transcribed while the third was reviewed and partially transcribed.

Weeklong visits to each teacher's classroom and school occurred in February and March 2015. Due to weather constraints, I observed in Rachel's and Michael's classrooms for four days each (there were school cancellations due to snow on Monday of each week). I observed in Beth's classroom for a full five day week. I observed Sarah in her classroom for four days and on the fifth day observed in the classrooms of her music colleagues in order to better understand the scope of the school's music program.

Weeklong visits to each classroom were conducted for two reasons. The first is practical and due to time and budget constraints that made shorter, more frequent trips inadvisable. The second reason is that general music teachers typically have a different schedule and see different classes based on the day of the week. Consequently, it was important to observe an entire week when possible in order to understand the scope of each music teacher's lived experience as a middle level teacher (both general music and other responsibilities).

Prior to the first site visit, an observation and field-text protocol (Appendix N) was developed. This protocol was derived from the research questions and drew upon techniques for composing field texts described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). On two days of the visit, the protocol suggested writing a field text description in the voice of a young adolescent in the classroom or in the voice of the music teacher participant. These imagined field texts were inspired by the work of Barone in *Touching Eternity* (2001) and required the researcher to imagine and playfully embody the experience of a different player in the classroom community, thus conjuring a more complex researched space. In addition, the protocol included reminder details for the five components of *This We Believe*, compiled based on the *This We Believe* document, the survey analysis, and the open-ended responses from the survey. Finally, individualized questions, based on the screening interview, were established as a starting place

for the observations. Following each day in the field, researcher reflections and field-texts were written using the protocol as a guiding, but open-ended, tool.

Observation notes, classroom photographs, and curricular materials were collected during each school visit. Daily informal conversations with each participant served to clarify questions and probe interesting classroom occurrences throughout the week. For each participant, a binder of handouts and other materials, a spiral notebook filled with field notes, and approximately 20 pages of typed field texts were generated or collected.

### **Trustworthiness**

In order to establish trustworthiness in the qualitative portion of this study, several techniques were utilized. Establishment of rapport with participants is a critical component of narrative methodology. This rapport began with the screening interview and participants were selected partially due to the rapport established during this call. The time spent in the participants' classrooms and the length of interviews served to further establish rapport between the researcher and the individual participants. This prolonged engagement and persistent observation over time enabled understanding of the scope and depth of a participant's experience as a middle level general music teacher and enabled the writing of thick, detailed descriptions from the data collected. During this phase of the study, participants were asked to review drafts of the constructed narratives, an important form of member checking that served to strengthen rapport with participants. Additionally, the collection of curriculum documents along with interviews and classroom observations triangulated data to confirm assertions made in the final narratives. Throughout construction of the narratives, several disinterested peers read the stories and provided feedback and suggestions for improvement.

In addition to these steps taken to establish trustworthiness in this phase of the study, it is important to clarify my bias as a researcher. I approach the overall topic of middle level general music as an insider. I am a certified K-12 music educator, and completed an undergraduate preservice preparation program in music education. My student teaching and most of my teaching career have been devoted to general music. As was mentioned in the prelude, during 2014-2015, I taught eighth grade general music as well as a small after-school choir. During the 2015-2016 school year, I taught seventh and eighth grade general music. While I am intimately familiar with teaching middle level general music myself, I am an outsider to the school communities and the personal and professional experiences of the individual narrative participants. Prior to the screening interviews, these participants were strangers to me. This insider-outsider perspective allowed me to connect to and better understand each narrative participant's teaching practices and stories of experience, yet it still allowed me to remain distanced from them. However, I developed close relationships with each of these participants over my weeklong visit in their classroom. My role as a researcher often became blurred with my identity as a teacher as I helped clean the classroom, write hall passes, move equipment, and generally participated in the life of the participant's school.

### **Confidentiality**

The University of Illinois Institutional Review Board approved this phase of the research (see Appendix G). All data for this phase was stored on the Illinois secure server. In order to protect the confidentiality of narrative participants, a pseudonym key for participant names and school names was created and kept in a secure location separate from the data. In addition, the geographic locations of participants' schools were generalized. Although the in-classroom observations were focused on the teacher, the observation of teacher-to-student interactions was

inevitable. No student identifying information was utilized in this study. Where teacher-to-student interactions were described, student descriptions and names were altered to protect students. In accordance with IRB, a letter was sent home to parents, by the participant, in advance of my classroom observation (see Appendix O); however, parents were not required to provide consent for this study. The informed consent letter for the screening interview is available in Appendix P, and the informed consent letter for classroom visits is available in Appendix Q.

### **Narrative Analysis**

In accordance with narrative inquiry, the analysis of the narrative phase began during the first site visit. The construction of field texts from observation notes was one form of analysis. However, following the four site visits, analysis began in earnest with reading and rereading the interview transcripts, observation notes, field texts, and other collected materials (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Utilizing NVivo software, these materials were coded for narrative elements, *This We Believe* characteristics (RQ1), aspects of lived experience (RQ2), and the guiding principles used by teachers (RQ3) (see Appendix N). All pieces of data were read and reread multiple times in order to code carefully across the four narrative participants.

In narrative inquiry, analysis and construction of texts is intertwined. Analysis in this study sought to uncover the professional knowledge landscape of each narrative participant, which Clandinin and Connelly suggest is positioned “at the interface of theory and practice in teachers’ lives” (1996, p. 24). Following initial coding of the collected data, excerpts from the previously written field texts were compiled to serve as the starting place for narrative construction. The first solid draft of each narrative focused on thick description of the teacher, the classroom, the curriculum, and the school. The participants reviewed this early draft of their



narrative and their comments and feedback led to reanalysis and further writing. Narrative elements emerged from the thickly described first drafts, and focal elements of each participant's practice, principles, and experience came to the forefront. This cyclical process of analysis, writing, and revision continued throughout the narrative analysis.

Each cycle of revision required a return to the original data, a reanalysis of components of the story, and revision of the narrative text. The focus of later revision-analysis cycles was on telling a story clearly and thoughtfully, while still engaging the reader in the lives of the participants. In addition to the narrative participants, disinterested peers also served as reviewers of drafts and provided useful feedback from their perspective as educators. When necessary for the storytelling process, narrative participants were asked, via email, to clarify or provide more details regarding a piece of data in order to strengthen analysis. The four participants read a final draft of their narrative and any additional questions or concerns, including those related to confidentiality, were addressed. Each narrative document went through more than five full revisions, in addition to numerous smaller revisions, before the final text was constructed.

### **Dialectic, Mixed Methods Analysis**

According to Greene, the intersection of two paradigmatic perspectives is the essence of mixing methods because “[inviting] multiple mental models into the same inquiry space for purposes of respectful conversation, dialogue, and learning from the other, [leads to] a collective generation of better understanding of the phenomena being studied” (2007, p. 13). The combining of multiple paradigmatic stances is what Greene (2007) calls the dialectic perspective in mixed methods research.

Greene proposed the dialectic perspective as a paradigmatic stance for mixed methods (2007; Greene & Hall, 2010); however, few practical examples of implementing this stance in analysis exist in the literature. According to Greene and Hall,

The actual dialectic mixing of consequence lies in the construction or composition of inferences, drawn from purposeful conversations among and integrations of different threads of data patterns. Such composition is a cognitive process, conducted in dialogue by an inquiry team and in internal dialogue by a sole inquirer. (2010, pp. 125-126)

Drawing on an example provided by Smith (1997), I conducted a dialectic, mixed methods analysis that integrated findings from the survey and narrative phases into a discussion of issues faced by middle school general music teachers.

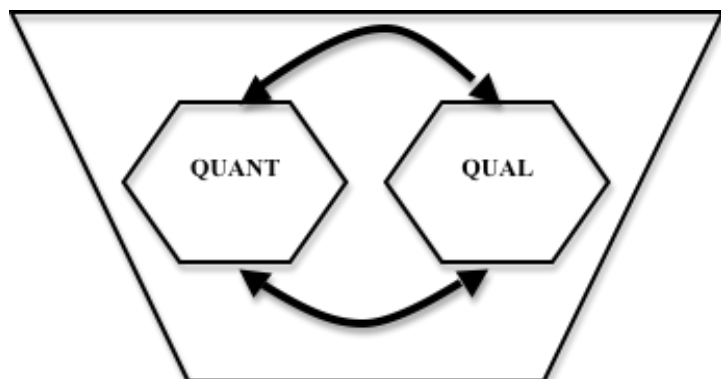
Smith (1997) combined case study/focus group data and survey data in a mixed methods analysis she developed from Erikson's (1986) analytic induction model. In this analysis, Smith returned to the original interview transcripts and field notes from her case study/focus group phases as well as the descriptive statistics from her survey phase in order to work with the "least processed level" of data. Smith reread all pieces of data and tracked her thematic thinking using memos. After reading the data several times, and attempting to view all forms of data as equally important, Smith developed assertions she believed could be supported by the data. Finally, she organized the data into warrants that either confirmed or contradicted the assertions. When data from both the case studies/focus groups and the survey supported an assertion, this strengthened her mixed methods analysis.

In my dialectic analysis, I used techniques of narrative analysis in combination with the analytic induction technique described by Erickson (1986) and Smith (1997). Although both analysis techniques come from an interpretivist perspective, "whether data happen to be in the

form of words or in the form of numbers should not materially affect the process of constructing meaning” across the two forms of data (Smith, 1997, p. 80). After the first two phases of analysis were complete and chapters drafted, I returned to the descriptive statistics and data collected during the narrative phase. I read and reread these pieces of data, along with the results from the survey and narrative phases. I began by generating assertions and supporting these assertions with data from both phases of the study. After this initial data processing, I began thinking about several paired concepts that emerged out of the data. These paired concepts, while not assertions as suggested by Erickson (1986) and Smith (1997), provided several key points of consonance and dissonance across the two phases of the study. This dialectic, mixed methods analysis resulted in three paired concepts that are discussed in the final chapter. In addition, I address all three research questions using data from both phases of the survey. Figure 3.2 presents a graphical representation of how data from both phases of the study were combined, funneled, and analyzed in this dialectic analysis.

Figure 3.2

*Dialectic Analysis*



## CHAPTER 4: THE SURVEY

The broad purpose of the national survey using the Middle Level General Music Measure (MLGMM) was to collect information about the teaching of middle level general music from music teachers self-identifying (through NAFME membership) as middle level teachers. The specific research purpose of the MLGMM was to assess the principles utilized by general music teachers at the middle level when designing and teaching middle level general music, and to determine the alignment of these principles to those stated in *This We Believe*. This is the first known data collection of its kind.

As a reminder, in order to determine whether the principles used by teachers align with *This We Believe*, the focus is on the five characteristics related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These five characteristics from *This We Believe* are: 1) Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them; 2) Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning; 3) Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant; 4) Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches; and 5) Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it (NMSA, 2010). Within the MLGMM, a set of 28 survey items was developed, *a priori*, to yield five scales aligned with these five characteristics (see Table 4.1).<sup>9</sup>

This chapter presents the data collected through this survey and the results of subsequent analyses. First, I present a summary of the survey respondent population based on the demographic data collected. Next, I discuss the survey results related to research question 1 (RQ1): How and to what extent are middle level music teachers' beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with *This We Believe*? Then I present the

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<sup>9</sup>For more information regarding scale creation, please see the discussion of the pilot survey in Chapter 3 and the Research Question 1 section below.

Table 4.1

*Items comprising Five Scales derived from This We Believe Characteristics*

<i>This We Believe Characteristic</i>	Scale		Total Likert Score Range	Individual Items				
	Number of Items	Name		Descriptions	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them	9	TWB1	9-36	• Confidence in YA physical transitions	691	3.38	0.63	
				• Confidence in YA cognitive transitions	691	3.20	0.69	
				• Confidence in YA development of abstract thinking	691	3.09	0.73	
				• Confidence in YA search for competence	688	3.19	0.70	
				• Confidence in YA development of personal identity	689	3.27	0.70	
				• Confidence in YA desire for personal autonomy	688	3.32	0.70	
				• Confidence in YA desire for belonging	688	3.63	0.54	
				• Confidence in YA need for support/desire for independence	686	3.52	0.59	
				• Confidence in uneven and unequal development	698	3.42	0.68	
Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning	7	TWB2	7-35	• Curriculum including using technologies for musical creation	756	2.98	1.32	
				• Curriculum allowing for student choice	759	3.82	0.97	
				• Pedagogies involving collaborating with students when developing activities	716	3.11	1.03	
				• Pedagogies involving individualized learning activities	721	3.15	0.98	
				• Pedagogies involving student directed music making	722	3.15	1.01	
				• Pedagogies engaging students personally in musical learning	720	3.73	0.84	
				• Curriculum empowering students to make decisions about their music education	759	3.56	1.07	
Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant	6	TWB3	6-30	• Curriculum answering students' questions about music	759	4.23	0.83	
				• Curriculum including challenging musical problems	741	2.52	1.19	
				• Curriculum including musical careers	743	2.54	1.15	
				• Curriculum responding to the musical interests of students	762	4.21	0.84	

Table 4.1 (cont.)

				• Curriculum involving connections across the school curriculum	759	3.96	0.93
				• Curriculum including the exploration of music creation	762	3.42	1.17
Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches	3	TWB4	3-15	• Curriculum exploring diverse forms of music and music making	756	3.99	0.97
				• Pedagogies involving student choice	719	3.04	0.93
				• Pedagogies involving independent and small group work	722	3.74	0.76
Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it	3	TWB5	3-15	• Pedagogies using diverse assessment tools	715	3.67	0.96
				• Pedagogies using individualized assessment	719	2.97	1.20
				• Pedagogies involving collaborating with students on assessments	721	2.34	1.06

*Note: More information regarding TWB1-5 scales available in Table 4.6*

survey results related to research question 2 (RQ2): How and to what extent are music teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement? This chapter concludes with a brief summary of the survey findings and the implications of such for the next phase of the study.

### **Response Population Summary**

One goal of the survey distribution was to survey a population of middle level music teachers from across the United States. A total of 1,369 (8.5%) music teachers, self-identifying as middle school teachers on their NAFME membership, responded to the survey. This section describes the respondent population based on the demographic data collected on the survey (Tables 4.2 & 4.3).

Table 4.2

*Survey Respondents by Four Demographic Variables*

Demographic Variable	<i>N</i>	Percentage
<b>Geographic Location</b>		
Mid-Atlantic	96	7.0
Midwest	424	31.0
Northeast	307	22.4
Northwest	132	9.6
South	254	18.6
Southwest	117	8.6
Non Contiguous	18	1.3
No response	21	1.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,369</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<b>Years of Teaching Experience</b>		
0-5	589	43.02
6-10	311	22.72
11-20	255	18.63
21-30	151	11.03
30-50	55	4.02
No Response	8	0.58
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,369</i>	<i>100.00</i>
<b>Bachelor's Degree Leading to Teacher Certification</b>		
Yes	1,166	85.2
No	192	14.0
No Response	11	0.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,369</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<b>Ever Taught Middle Level General Music</b>		
Never	481	35.1
Yes	832	60.8
No Response	56	4.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,369</i>	<i>100.0</i>

**Geographic Location**

Survey respondents taught in geographic regions throughout the United States and abroad. The largest percentages of respondents taught in the Midwest (31%), Northeast (22.4%), and South (18.6%). Eighteen respondents taught in non-contiguous geographic regions. The non-contiguous option was intended for those teaching in Alaska and Hawaii, but according to survey metadata reported by SurveyGizmo.com, a few American teachers working internationally also responded. While the respondents are not evenly distributed across the country, the geographic locations reported by respondents suggest that the survey collected data

from music teachers from across the United States.

### **Bachelor's Degree for Certification**

An overwhelming portion of the respondents (85.2%) received a bachelor's degree leading to certification. While most respondents entered the teaching field through the traditional bachelor's degree with certification pathway, 14% of respondents entered music teaching through an alternative means. It is beyond the scope of this survey to know the means (alternative certification, masters degrees, private school teaching, etc.) through which these teachers entered the profession. Geographically, those without bachelor's degrees leading to certification are more likely to be teaching in the South, Southwest, and Northeast and less likely to be teaching in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic. They are equally likely to be teaching in the Northwest and in non-contiguous locations.

### **Years Teaching**

Respondents to the survey have an average of 10 years ( $SD = 9.33$ ) of teaching experience. The years of experience reported by respondents ranged from zero ( $n = 27$ ) to fifty ( $n = 1$ ). Almost half ( $n = 589$ , 43%) of the survey respondents reported less than six years of teaching experience.

### **Teaching Preferences**

The population for this survey was teachers who selected "junior/middle" as one of their "teaching levels" on their NAFME membership application. But this does not necessarily indicate that the middle grades are the teacher's preferred grades to teach. When asked which grade level grouping (PreK, Elementary, Middle School, or High School) they preferred, just over half of the respondents preferred teaching middle school (Table 4.3).

Additionally, responding to the survey does not mean teachers identify as general music



Table 4.3

*Respondents based on Music Teacher Identity and Preferred Grade Level*

Teaching Preferences Variables	N	Percentage
<i>See-Self Identity</i>		
Band Director	509	37.2
Choir Director	327	23.9
General Music Teacher	249	18.2
Orchestral Director	145	10.6
Other	131	9.6
No response	8	0.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,369</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<i>Preferred Grade</i>		
PreK	4	0.3
Elementary	201	14.7
Middle School	706	51.6
High School	367	26.8
Other	78	5.7
No response	13	1.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,369</i>	<i>100.0</i>

teachers because music teachers often have multiple areas of musical and teaching expertise.

While the population selection procedures focused on general music at the middle level, middle level music teachers often teach a combination of courses including general music. Only 249 respondents see themselves as general music teachers. Nearly 72% of respondents see themselves as ensemble directors: band (36.18%), choir (23.89%), or orchestra (10.59%). Less than ten percent of the population selected the “other” option. Many of those selecting the other option then specified two or more of the following: general music, orchestra, band, or choir. A few respondents said “all of the above,” while others said things like Music Educator/Teacher or Music Director. A small number of “other” respondents were specific and inserted Guitar Instructor, Percussion Instructor, or Steel Band Director. Although the survey focused on general music, it is clear that the majority of respondents do not self-identify as general music teachers.

## 2014-2015 Teaching Assignments

Teachers were asked to report the courses they were currently teaching during the 2014-2015 school year, selecting all courses that comprised their teaching load, meaning that a given teacher might teach elementary and middle school band as well as middle school general music. The percentages reported here and in Table 4.4 are for each type of music course out of 1,369 respondents. As an example, each respondent either does or does not teach elementary band. Respondents largely reported teaching middle school music courses. The courses taught most frequently, middle school band and middle school choir, were taught by over forty percent of

Table 4.4

*2014-2015 Teaching Assignments based on Musical Content Area (N = 1,369)*

Current Teaching Assignment	<i>N</i>	Percentage
<b>Band</b>		
PreK	17	1.24
Elementary	200	14.61
Middle School	567	41.42
High School	291	21.26
<b>Choir</b>		
PreK	23	1.68
Elementary	158	11.54
Middle School	563	41.12
High School	231	16.87
<b>General Music</b>		
PreK	96	7.01
Elementary	353	25.79
Middle School	475	34.70
High School	83	6.06
<b>Orchestra</b>		
PreK	2	0.15
Elementary	88	6.43
Middle School	191	13.95
High School	86	6.28
<b>Other</b>		
PreK	11	0.8
Elementary	43	3.14
Middle School	169	12.34
High School	122	8.91
<i>No Response</i>	92	6.72

respondents. Middle school general music was taught by one-third of respondents, while a much smaller population taught middle school orchestra (13.95%). A quarter of respondents taught elementary general music, the most frequently taught elementary course. One out of five respondents taught high school band while one out of six respondents taught high school choir.

Respondents were also able to select “other” as an option and describe their teaching responsibilities beyond general music and the standard ensembles. The middle school music courses listed most often by respondents were some form of guitar (3%), theatre or musical theatre (2.63%), individual or group lessons (1.53%), and piano (1.31%). Non-traditional music ensembles, for example, mariachi, handbells, African drumming, steel drums, ukulele, and Orff ensembles were reported as part of the middle school teaching load for 1.68% of respondents. Additionally respondents (1.51%) reported teaching non-music classes at the middle level including study hall, reading, math, advisory, and several others. Respondents also included “other” courses at the preK, elementary, and high school level.

### **Experience Teaching Middle Level General Music**

Sixty-one percent of respondents reported experience teaching middle level general music at some point during their career. Table 4.5 presents the prioritization of curriculum content in middle level general music courses taught by respondents<sup>10</sup> with experience teaching the course. The item listening to, analyzing, and evaluating music was considered an essential priority for nearly a third of the population (the content with the largest emphasis) while a focus on music careers and challenging musical problems were considered an essential priority by less than ten percent of respondents. Less than fifteen percent of respondents prioritized popular musics or world musics as essential components of their curriculum. When asked to specify

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<sup>10</sup>Those respondents who reported never teaching middle level general music, 39%, did not complete the remainder of the survey. They were excused from the remainder of the survey through survey logic built into the survey instrument.

what influenced their curricular decisions, 67.65% of respondents selected either a great deal or a moderate amount of influence from the National Standards (either the 1994 or 2014 versions).<sup>11</sup> For state or district standards/benchmarks, 73% of respondents reported that these documents influenced their decisions about middle level general music curriculum either a great deal or a moderate amount.

Table 4.5

*Prioritization of Content in Middle Level General Music Courses Taught*

Item	Not a Priority	Low Priority	Medium Priority	High Priority	Essential
Western Music Theory ( <i>n</i> = 756)*	9.26	18.65	29.37	25.53	17.20
Western Music History ( <i>n</i> = 754)	7.69	20.82	32.49	25.73	13.26
Musical Performance ( <i>n</i> = 760)*	7.89	14.74	23.95	27.76	25.66
Music Listening, Analysis, and Evaluation ( <i>n</i> = 765)*	1.44	5.49	25.10	37.12	30.85
World Musics ( <i>n</i> = 759)	7.25	17.79	34.65	26.35	13.97
Popular Musics ( <i>n</i> = 757)	6.21	19.29	39.89	23.91	10.70
Music Careers ( <i>n</i> = 743)	20.46	31.76	26.92	14.80	6.06
Music Creation (improvisation & composition) ( <i>n</i> = 762)*	7.22	13.91	29.92	27.82	21.13
The Use of Technology for Music Creation ( <i>n</i> = 756)	17.59	19.44	25.13	22.75	15.08
Challenging Musical Problems ( <i>n</i> = 741)	24.43	26.86	28.07	14.04	6.61
Historical and Cultural Contexts of music ( <i>n</i> = 764)*	3.80	10.99	28.66	32.59	23.95

\*Aligned with the 1994 National Standards for Music Education

### **RQ1: This We Believe Congruence**

For the remainder of this chapter, only the responses of those with experience teaching middle level general music (*N* = 832) will be discussed. Respondents without experience teaching general music at the middle level did not answer items related to their personal experience teaching this course as logic built into the survey instrument excused them from this

<sup>11</sup>The survey was distributed in the early fall of 2014, immediately following the release of the 2014 National Core Arts Standards. The survey item references both the 1994 and 2014 versions of the National Standards, but used language found in the 1994 version.

portion of the survey. In this section I present results related to RQ1: How and to what extent are middle level music teachers' beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with *This We Believe* by discussing 1) the respondent population's awareness of *This We Believe*, 2) the relationship between awareness and responses about curricular and pedagogical prioritization, and 3) the overall congruency of responses to the beliefs stated in *This We Believe*.

### **Awareness of This We Believe**

Of the 832 respondents to the question: "I am aware of *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, the middle school philosophy document from the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE),"<sup>12</sup> 91% claimed no knowledge of *This We Believe* while only 9% of respondents claimed awareness of this document.<sup>13</sup> Among respondents unfamiliar with *This We Believe*, 49.37% reported preferring to teach middle school grades. However, 71% of those familiar with *This We Believe* reported preferring to teach middle school over other grade levels. The relationship between awareness of *This We Believe* and preference for teaching middle school is a statistically significant finding  $X^2(1, N = 688) = 11.3, p = .001$ .

### ***This We Believe* Characteristics and Awareness of *This We Believe***

**Scale Creation.** Mentioned briefly above, 28 survey items were utilized to create five scales aligned with the five characteristics of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in *This We Believe* (see Table 4.1). These scales were constructed through the creation of composite

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<sup>12</sup>Respondents were asked this survey question following questions regarding their pedagogical practice in order to avoid influencing responses on the twenty-eight items discussed in the next section. A respondent's answer to this question does not imply implementation of middle level principles in his or her middle school general music class.

<sup>13</sup>The remaining respondents ( $n = 140$ ) have missing data, likely due to dropping out of the survey. A similar result was found in the pilot survey; however, in that instance 20% ( $n = 35$ ) claimed familiarity with *This We Believe*.

additive variables.<sup>14</sup> Composite variables TWB1 and TWB5 were easily created as survey items comprising these two scales used an identical Likert scale. However, the scales for TWB2, TWB3, and TWB4 were comprised of items utilizing multiple Likert scales, albeit all five point scales. The items in these scales were standardized ( $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$ ) before the creation of the composite variable in order to accommodate items from multiple scales within the survey (Table 4.6 & 4.1). Using STATA, standardized scores were then recoded on a 1 to 5 (one negative, five positive) Likert-style scale for ease of presentation.

An example will help to explain this process. TWB4 was comprised of three items: 1) curriculum exploring diverse forms of music and music making; 2) pedagogies involving student choice; and 3) pedagogies involving independent and small group work. Item 1 was answered on a five point Likert scale ranging from Never to a Great Deal. Items 2 and 3 were answered on a five point Likert scale ranging from Never to Always. Scores from these three items were then standardized ( $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$ ) and added together resulting in fifteen scores<sup>15</sup> ranging from -3.11 to 2.26. These scores were then grouped and recoded for display on a five-point Likert scale. The same approach was applied to TWB2 and TWB3. These scales were then used in the analysis described in the sections below.

The internal consistency of each scale was tested using Cronbach's alpha. Alpha scores are reported in Table 4.6. The TWB1, TWB2, TWB3, and TWB5 scales appear to have good internal consistency,  $\alpha \geq 0.70$ . In each of these scales, all items appeared worthy of retention. However, in TWB4, the internal consistency is only modest,  $\alpha = 0.47$ . This scale only contains

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<sup>14</sup>Factor analysis was also conducted using the 28 survey items, but was ultimately rejected in favor of the composite additive variable approach because it better reflected the original conceptual ideas with which the survey was constructed.

<sup>15</sup>The number of scores was determined based on the number of items in a scale multiplied by the number of possibilities in the Likert scale. For TWB4, three items multiplied by five point scales equals fifteen. Level one of the Likert scale was not used by any respondent to these three items, thus a score of zero for TWB4 in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

*TWB Scales Summary Statistics and Percentages*

Scale	Descriptive Statistics						Likert Scale Scores				
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	Skewness	Kurtosis	1 Low	2	3	4	5 High
TWB1 <sup>a</sup>	666	3.67	0.50	0.90	-1.11	3.49	0.15	0.90	N/A	30.93	68.02
TWB2 <sup>b</sup>	687	3.80	0.75	0.81	-0.26	2.80	0.00	4.37	27.37	52.26	16.01
TWB3 <sup>b</sup>	713	3.87	0.70	0.70	-0.29	3.34	0.28	1.54	25.25	56.52	16.41
TWB4 <sup>b,c</sup>	706	3.90	0.67	0.47	-0.20	2.97	0.00	1.42	22.24	59.21	17.14
TWB5	712	3.29	0.89	0.70	-0.33	2.69	1.54	16.01	42.28	32.02	8.15

<sup>a</sup>Assessed on a 4 point scale.

<sup>b</sup>Composite variable standardized,  $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$  and recoded as described above.

<sup>c</sup>Scale dropped from further analysis.

Table 4.7

*Independent group t-tests for TWB Scales and This We Believe Awareness*

Scale	<i>TWB</i>		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Pr( T > t )	Pr(T<t)
	Aware									
TWB1 <sup>a</sup>	No		603	3.66	0.50	3.62 3.70	-2.0115	74.0832	0.0479	0.0240
	Yes		60	3.78	0.45	3.67 3.90				
TWB2	No		595	3.78	0.74	3.72 3.84	-3.1697	650	0.0016	0.0008
	Yes		57	4.11	0.82	3.89 4.32				
TWB3 <sup>a</sup>	No		586	3.85	0.68	3.79 3.90	-2.7586	62.3156	0.0076	0.0038
	Yes		56	4.16	0.83	3.95 4.38				
TWB5	No		614	3.26	0.86	3.19 3.33	-4.0118	672	0.0001	0.0000
	Yes		60	3.73	0.95	3.49 3.98				

<sup>a</sup>Unequal variances, Satterthwaite's approximation calculated.

three items; removal of any item did not significantly improve the internal consistency. The TWB4 scale was dropped from further analysis.

**T-Test Analysis.** Independent group t-tests (Table 4.7) were conducted to determine whether a teacher's score on a particular composite variable was related to his/her awareness of the *This We Believe* document. These t-tests<sup>16</sup> yielded a statistically significant result for all four remaining scales. These results indicate that those aware of *This We Believe* are different from those unaware of *This We Believe* in their confidence in young adolescent development (TWB1)  $t(74.08) = -2.01, p = 0.0479$ ;<sup>17</sup> their engagement with students in active, purposeful learning (TWB2)  $t(650) = -3.17, p = 0.0016$ ; the use of curriculum that is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant (TWB3)  $t(62.32) = -2.76, p = 0.0076$ ;<sup>18</sup> and their use of varied and ongoing assessments (TWB5)  $t(672) = -4.01, p = 0.0001$ . In addition, for three of these tests (TWB2, TWB3, and TWB5), the mean intervals do not overlap at the 95% confidence interval (see Table 4.8) thus indicating a stronger statistical relationship between awareness of *This We Believe* and 1) a teacher's engagement in active, purposeful learning; 2) use of curriculum that is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant; and 3) use of varied and ongoing assessments. Based on these t-tests, there is evidence to suggest that those aware of *This We Believe* have a higher confidence in young adolescent development and are more likely to select curricula and pedagogical strategies aligned with the characteristics of *This We Believe* as tested.

### **Congruence of Curriculum and Pedagogical Priorities to *This We Believe***

The items that comprise the *This We Believe* scales focused on curriculum and pedagogy (TWB2, TWB3, and TWB5) were designed so respondents reporting high scores on the Likert

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<sup>16</sup>T-test statistics are negative because those aware of the *This We Believe* document have higher means than those unaware and the analysis subtracted the aware group from the unaware group.

<sup>17</sup>Unequal variances, Satterthwaite's approximation calculated

<sup>18</sup>Unequal variances, Satterthwaite's approximation calculated



scale of any particular item were those most aligned with the principles set out in *This We Believe*. Looking at the respondent population as a whole, if respondents heavily favored the high end of the Likert scale, then it would be possible to cautiously conclude that music educator respondents were aligning their work with the characteristics of *This We Believe*, regardless of their knowledge of the document itself.

Over sixty percent of all respondents (those aware and unaware of *This We Believe*) selected the top two options on the Likert scale for TWB2 (engagement with students in active, purposeful learning) and TWB3 (curriculum that is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant). However, less than one fifth of the respondents selected the highest level of the Likert scale. These results indicate that only a small percentage of respondents are fully aligned with these two characteristics of *This We Believe*, but that over half of the respondents favor these characteristics. Despite only a few music teachers possessing knowledge of the *This We Believe* document, over half prioritize curricular and pedagogical decisions that sometimes or always align with these two characteristics of *This We Believe*.

In contrast, the response population is less aligned with TWB5, the characteristic that states: “varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it” (NMSA, 2010). The *This We Believe* document specifies the need of young adolescents to be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge through many different forms of assessment, to have assessments individualized to their personal needs, and to work collaboratively with their teacher and peers in designing assessments. Only forty percent of respondents selected Always or Often (the top two options) for this scale; less than 10% selected the Always option. Over 17% of respondents selected the two lowest options on the Likert scale indicating that they “rarely” or “never” used the diverse forms of assessment specified. These findings suggest that the majority

of respondents are unlikely to utilize the varied assessment strategies suggested in *This We Believe* in their general music practice.

### **RQ2: Lived Experience of Middle Level Music Teachers**

In this section, I discuss the results from RQ2: How and to what extent are music teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement? On the survey, respondents were asked "to what extent are your ideas about X (above) a result of the following experiences?" On a four-point Likert scale, respondents ranked their personal understanding of the influence of each of the six aspects of lived experience on 1) their curricular choices, 2) their pedagogical decisions, and 3) their confidence in their knowledge of young adolescent development. Scores on these three responses were then added to create one composite variable for each of the six aspects of lived experience: preservice preparation, reading professional journals, conversations with colleagues, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement (Table 4.8). Possible scores on these six composite variables ranged from one to twelve and were recoded<sup>19</sup> in groups of three to present results on the four-point Likert scale (Table 4.8).<sup>20</sup>

#### **Reported Influence of Lived Experience**

Descriptive statistics indicate that a teacher's teaching experience, personal musical engagement, and conversations with colleagues are highly connected to the curricular and pedagogical choices teachers make as well as to their confidence in their knowledge of young

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<sup>19</sup>The same procedure was used with the Lived Experience composite variables as was used with the *TWB* composite variables in the section above. However, no standardization of variables was required given that all Lived Experience items were assessed on the same four-point Likert scale.

<sup>20</sup>The recoding of the data to the four-point Likert scale was done for ease of presentation and comprehensibility. The results presented on the continuous scale are available in Appendix R.

Table 4.8

*Lived Experience Composite Variables and Response Percentages*

Composite Variable	Descriptive Statistics					Likert Scale Scores <sup>a</sup>			
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis	Not at All	Small Extent	Moderate Extent	Great Extent
Preservice Preparation	683	2.99	0.83	-0.43	2.50	4.39	22.25	43.63	29.72
Professional Periodicals	677	3.43	0.78	0.01	2.60	9.01	41.80	40.62	8.57
Conversations with Colleagues	677	2.49	0.64	-0.73	2.83	0.30	7.39	41.80	50.52
Professional Development	675	3.24	0.74	-0.67	2.92	1.78	13.33	44.44	40.44
Teaching Experience	683	3.86	0.36	-2.47	8.56	0.00	0.59	12.59	86.82
Musical Engagement	678	3.58	0.60	-1.18	3.77	0.29	4.87	31.71	63.13

<sup>a</sup>Likert Scale labels presented here are identical to those on the survey instrument

adolescent development. Over half of all respondents selected the “to a great extent” option for these three aspects of lived experience. An overwhelming 87% of respondents selected “to a great extent” for the influence of their teaching experience. These results indicate that a music teacher’s active engagement in the school and musical setting as a professional teacher have the greatest impact on his/her middle level general music classroom.

Forty percent of respondents indicated that professional development influenced their work in middle level general music “to a great extent.” Another 40% indicated that this aspect of the lived experience influenced their work “to a moderate extent.” While not as influential on respondents as teaching experience, personal musical engagement, or conversations with colleagues, it appears that professional development is also influential on the curricular and pedagogical decisions respondents make as well as on their confidence in young adolescent development.

In contrast, preservice preparation and reading of professional periodicals appear to be least likely to influence the work of teachers in middle level general music. Less than a third of respondents selected the “to a great extent” option for preservice preparation, and less than 10% selected the same for reading professional periodicals. In addition, a larger percentage of respondents selected the “not at all” option for preservice preparation and reading professional journals, as compared with the four aspects of lived experience discussed above.<sup>21</sup> The impact of preservice preparation and the reading of professional periodicals on the middle level general music work of the respondents are notably different from the other four aspects of lived experience investigated.

### **Lived Experience and Curricular and Pedagogical Decisions Aligned with *This We Believe***

Crosstabs with Fisher’s exact test for statistical significance were conducted on all six aspects of Lived Experience crossed with all four of the *This We Believe* scales for a total of twenty-four tests (Table 4.9).<sup>22</sup> Fisher’s exact was utilized over the more common Pearson’s chi-squared test due to the low expected counts in some cells of each crosstab. Seventeen of these 24 tests were statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval.

Specifically, four aspects of these crosstab analyses are worthy of note. First, all five crosstabs for the professional development composite variable were statistically significant. Second, all of the crosstabs for the musical engagement composite variable were statistically significant. While no causation can be established given the existing data, it does appear that there is a relationship between the professional development and musical engagement aspects of Lived Experience and a teacher’s score on the *TWB* scales.

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<sup>21</sup>It is beyond the scope of the survey to know whether respondents perceive professional journals as irrelevant to teaching middle school general music or whether respondents simply do not read professional journals.

<sup>22</sup>Due to the size of these tables, Fisher’s exact tests were difficult to calculate. The composite variables for TWB2, TWB3, and TWB5 were recoded to achieve a three-point scale. Scores of 1 and 2 were combined as were scores of 4 and 5.

Table 4.9

*Significance of crosstabs between TWB composite variables and Lived Experience Composite Variables using Fisher's Exact Test*

TWB Composite Variable	Preservice Preparation			Professional Journals			Conversations with Colleagues			Professional Development			Teaching Experience			Musical Engagement		
	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
TWB1	659	9	0.346	654	9	0.154	653	9	0.006	650	9	0.021	659	6	0.013	655	9	0.002
TWB2	652	6	0.170	546	6	0.000	646	6	0.000	644	6	0.026	650	4	0.085	647	6	0.000
TWB3	640	6	0.132	635	6	0.000	636	6	0.013	634	6	0.000	639	4	0.003	636	6	0.000
TWB5	671	6	0.321	666	6	0.000	666	6	0.182	664	6	0.029	671	4	0.002	666	6	0.002

Third, the crosstab tests of TWB3 and three Lived Experience variables (professional journals, professional development, and musical engagement) were all statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence interval. This result indicates a strong relationship between a respondent's prioritization of curriculum that is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant in middle level general music (TWB3) and the influence of a teacher's professional development, musical engagement, and reading of professional journals. While a relationship exists between these responses, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the direction of this relationship nor can causation be established.

Finally, none of the crosstabs for preservice preparation were statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval. This result indicates that a respondent's reported influence of preservice preparation has no relationship to his/her scores on the *TWB* scales.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the results of a national survey distributed to music teacher members of NAFME who indicated "junior/middle" as one of their teaching areas on their membership application. Of the 1,369 respondents to the survey, over 60% reported experience teaching middle level general music. The results presented herein focused on the first two research questions of this inquiry. In the sections below, I briefly review major findings from each research question and then discuss the influence of these findings on the narrative phase (phase two) of this mixed methods discussion.

### **Research Question 1**

Research question one sought to understand how teachers' beliefs about curriculum and pedagogy were congruent with the principles stated in the *This We Believe* document.<sup>23</sup> Less

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<sup>23</sup>RQ1: How and to what extent are middle level music teachers' beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with *This We Believe*?

than 10% of respondents experienced in middle level general music teaching reported awareness of the *This We Believe* document, yet the decisions teachers reported making in their middle level general music classrooms often aligned with principles of middle level philosophy stated in the *This We Believe* document. Respondents' reported use of diverse assessment is least aligned with the kinds of assessment described in *This We Believe*, a finding consistent with Wright's 2015 study of middle level language arts teachers. While evidence from the survey suggests that music teacher respondents align themselves with many aspects of middle level philosophy, statistically significant t-test results provide evidence to suggest that those aware of *This We Believe* are different from those unaware of *This We Believe* in terms of curricular and pedagogical decisions aligned with the middle level concept and reported confidence in young adolescent development. While research question one investigated respondents' awareness of the *This We Believe* document and respondents' reported alignment with stated principles, *This We Believe* is not the only means of acquiring the curricular and pedagogical principles of the middle level concept. The survey did not investigate any additional means through which respondents might become aware of or internalize the principles of the middle level concept. The findings from the survey suggest that knowledge of the *This We Believe* document impacts a middle level general music teacher's practice, but this document is only one way in which music teachers learn about the important aspects of the middle level concept.

## **Research Question 2**

Research question two investigated the lived experience factors most relevant to respondents' curricular and pedagogical decisions.<sup>24</sup> Results from research question two indicate that the active inservice work of teachers has a substantial influence on the practice of middle

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<sup>24</sup>RQ2: How and to what extent are music teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement?

level general music teachers. The active participation of a teacher in a school community (his or her teaching experience, conversations with colleagues, professional development, and personal musical engagement) were all reported as strong influences on middle level general music practice by a majority of respondents. Although beyond the scope of the survey, it is possible that the high levels of reported influence of teaching experience, conversations with colleagues, professional development, and personal musical engagement are somehow related to the school community to which a teacher belongs. For example, a music teacher belonging to a middle school community that integrates many aspects of the middle level concept would, perhaps unknowingly, gain an understanding of young adolescent development and the pedagogical recommendations stated in *This We Believe* that would impact his/her teaching of middle school general music. Again, this connection to school community is beyond the scope of the survey.

Preservice preparation is perhaps one of the most notable aspects of any teacher's lived experience. Over 85% of the survey respondents in this study received a bachelor's degree leading to certification thus indicating that the majority of survey respondents participated in a preservice preparation program designed to impact their identities as future music educators. From this overwhelming percentage, one might assume that respondents would rank preservice as a high influence on their practice; however, the reported influence of preservice preparation was fairly low. In addition, there was no statistically significant relationship between reported influence of preservice and any of the investigated *This We Believe* characteristics. Unlike schools of education which sometimes specifically prepare "core" subject teachers in a middle grades specific preservice program (Schamber, 1996; Thornton, 2013; White, Dever, Ross, Jones, & Miller, 2013), middle grades specific music education preservice is uncommon. According to a music education study by Henry (2005), fewer than ten states in the US offer a



music education certification in grades K-8 and fewer than five states offer a certification in grades 5-8. In contrast, over forty states (Henry, 2005) offer some form of an “all-levels” certification, and schools of music typically prepare students for these K-12 certifications.

### **Impact of Survey Results on Phase 2**

The four participants, whose stories are presented in the next chapter, were selected for diversity of perspective and experience in teaching middle level general music. This is the primary influence of the survey data collection on the narrative phase of this study. In accordance with the process described in Chapter 3, the four narrative participants were selected based on their survey responses and an initial screening interview. Given the small percentage of teachers reporting awareness of *This We Believe*, knowledge of this document was considered as only a minor component when selecting narrative participants for phase two of this study. Teachers’ descriptions of their practice in the open-ended questions, and the alignment of these described practices with the principles of the middle level concept were given more weight than knowledge of the *This We Believe* document. No teacher aware of *This We Believe* was ultimately selected for phase two.

Three aspects of the survey results influenced the selection of narrative participants. First, each of these four teachers reported aligning some, but not all, of his/her practice with ideas congruent with the middle level concept. Second, each of the four selected teachers works in a school community different, in grade level configuration, philosophy, and demographics, from the other participants, which provides a richer spectrum of school communities and practices ideal for storytelling. Third, three of the four participants graduated from a traditional bachelor’s degree program in music education while the fourth participant majored in music therapy and became a teacher through non-traditional means. Each of these teachers discussed

differences in the influence of his/her preservice on his/her current practice including courses remembered and instruction in the developmental characteristics of young adolescents. In selecting the narrative participants, diversity of curriculum/pedagogy, school community, and preservice preparation were major considerations.

In addition to the selection of participants, issues raised in the survey influenced the *a priori* focus of the narrative portion of the study. Due to lack of knowledge of the *This We Believe* document, reference to this document did not occur during the narrative site visits. However, the original protocol (see Appendix N) described practices aligned with the middle level concept and served to focus the investigation. In discussing middle school general music with the participants, the focus was on what the teachers did in the classroom, how they planned their teaching, and what influenced them to make those decisions. School community, an idea that emerged through survey data analysis, played a significant role in the narrative investigations. Every effort was made to understand the school community and its focus on young adolescents through discussions with the teacher, attendance at faculty meetings (as appropriate), and discussions with other teachers/principals. However, the most significant influence on understanding the school community was my ability to become a part of the school community for an entire school week. Participating in school-wide activities and confirming observations with the participant provided the greatest understanding of the influence of school community on the participant's practice. Finally, throughout the narrative process, discussions with the teacher returned to their memories of preservice preparation as well as their thoughts on what might change in music education preservice programs to better serve those who become general music teachers in middle schools. Each of these issues was an important component at the outset of phase two of this mixed methods study based on analysis of the survey data.

However, in some cases, these issues became less important as emergent issues arose both within and across site visits. The next chapter presents the stories of the four narrative participants.

## CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVES

As I moved from the survey data to the narrative phase, I began to engage with the particular, the lived experiences of Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael.<sup>25</sup> All four teachers completed the survey and were selected using the procedure described in Chapter 3. In the previous chapter, I identified three aspects of the survey data that influenced the selection of the narrative participants: 1) curriculum and pedagogy aligned with middle level philosophy, 2) school community diversity, and 3) preservice experiences. As the stories of each participant unfold, readers may find it difficult to keep the specific details of a teacher's school community, preservice program, and course load in mind, thus Table 5.1 is provided as a touchstone to help the reader. This table is not designed to summarize the experiences of these four individuals.

Table 5.1

*Demographic Overview of Narrative Participants*

	<b>Music Courses Taught (During School Time)</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>School Grade Levels</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>School Community</b>	<b>Preservice Degree</b>
<b>Rachel</b>	General Music (7 <sup>th</sup> ) Chorus (7 <sup>th</sup> girls; 8 <sup>th</sup> mixed) Rock Guitar (9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> )	8	7-12	Public	Rural	Music Education
<b>Beth</b>	General Music (K-8 <sup>th</sup> )	12	K-8	Catholic Independent	Suburban	Music Therapy
<b>Sarah</b>	General Music (7 <sup>th</sup> ) Guitar (8 <sup>th</sup> )	11	7-8	Public	Suburban	Music Education
<b>Michael</b>	General Music (K-7 <sup>th</sup> ) Chorus (6 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> all mixed)	4	K-8	Public	Urban	Music Education

I present these four narratives in the following order: Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and finally Michael. Drawn from interviews and weeklong classroom observations, these stories do not represent the entirety of each teacher's identity and practice, but rather are snapshots drawn from *the best representation possible* given what I personally experienced during my time in each

<sup>25</sup>All participant names, school names, and student names are pseudonyms.

classroom. In each instance, I selected a particular teacher based on what I thought he or she had to share about middle level general music after review of the open-ended survey responses and my initial phone interview; however, what I experienced was much more complex.

In this chapter, I present the lived experiences of Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael as lived by them and experienced by me. Together we constructed these stories in order to present them for interpretation by the reader. As with most narrative work, the work of writing and analysis are intertwined (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), but the experiences and expertise of the reader add a layer of interpretation to each narrative I present. In speaking of narrative inquiry, Stauffer and Barrett suggest well written narrative inquiry:

respects the reader as well as those represented in the text, anticipating that the reader is responsible for and capable of grappling with questions, considering contradictions, and bringing additional interpretations. (2009, p. 25)

According to Barone (1995), “the aim of storytellers . . . is not to prompt a single, closed, convergent reading but to persuade readers to contribute answers to the dilemmas they pose” (p. 66) for educational researchers “do not always need, within the same textual breath, to deconstruct in another style and format the epiphanies” illuminated in researched stories (p. 72). These narratives are written intentionally to provide the reader with interpretive space (Gadamer, Weinsheimer & Marshall, 2004), to create an “interpretive zone” between the research text and the reader (Wasser & Bresler, 1996). Exciting, boring, ambiguous, or challenging moments are purposefully written and some of these are explored in tandem with the survey data in the following chapter. In a brief summary section, I highlight some of the tensions raised across these narratives and prime the reader for the final discussion chapter.

## Rachel

*“I think I’ve always known I’ve wanted to teach middle school;  
I think this is like my life’s job.”<sup>26</sup>*

The bell rang and Rachel turned on the Smartboard projector, strapped on her guitar, and began to play. Students streamed down the long hallway into the classroom and Rachel greeted each student by name as she strummed her guitar. The noise of student chatter, squeaking sneakers, shuffling of guitar cases, books dropping on the floor, and the strumming of Rachel’s guitar were all accompanied by an erratic crescendo and decrescendo of hallway cacophony as the classroom door opened and closed as students entered.

Figure 5.1

*General Music Classroom at  
Washington Jr/Sr High School*



Slowly the students got out their guitars, collected books and folders from the cabinet, and took their assigned seat in one of twelve pairs of chairs arranged in a V-shaped pattern (Figure 5.1). The volume rose as students began warming up with the chord exercise projected on the Smartboard. The tardy bell rang as Rachel moved around the room, chatted with students, and tuned guitars. One guitar slung on her back, the other across her front, she made her way up and down the aisles. Somehow over the noise of 24 guitars, she managed to speak to each student individually about something: TV, their day, their guitar, or some interest or event they had discussed on a previous occasion.

Then, she was back at the front of the room to change the Smartboard slide. Color-coded

<sup>26</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all italicized text is directly quoted from interviews recorded on December 30, 2014, February 5, 2015, or July 30, 2015. Rachel’s story was developed from 2:38 hours of recorded interviews, four full-day observations in Rachel’s classroom, and the collection of student and teacher generated artifacts between February 3 and February 6, 2015.

chord charts for four chords appeared on the slide. “Play eight strums on each chord with two rests in between,” Rachel instructed. The students hunched over their guitars and attempted the task.

“If you are having trouble, what should you do?” Rachel asked when they finished.

“Just pick one or two chords,” came the reply.

“That’s right, pick one or two and always play that one when we get there. Now play the progression with one rest in between, then repeat it with no rests in between chords.”

They practiced the exercise again—too easy for some, too difficult for others, and like Goldilocks, just right for most. Rachel called out, “rest position,” and suddenly most students sat their guitar straight up on their right knee. Two by two, guitar necks pointed towards the ceiling and the room quieted.

A new chord pattern appeared on the board. “Please play this chord pattern with four strums on each chord. Practice it by yourself.” Haphazard strumming ensued as each student attempted the chord transitions independently while Rachel circulated the room simultaneously correcting playing technique, writing passes for kids, finding music and supplies for others, and cajoling non-participants into engagement.

“Rest position,” Rachel called out, “which chord transition is the hardest?”

Some students said one chord change, but others disagreed. Rachel returned to the previous technique of playing each chord a certain number of times followed by 2 rests, then 1 rest, then no rests in order to improve the fingering changes. This particular progression morphed seamlessly into a familiar song as the students followed Rachel’s instructions to play each chord four times. Rachel sang, her voice carrying easily over 24 guitars:

“Just a small town girl,  
livin’ in a lonely world,

she took the midnight train,  
goin' anywhere...<sup>27</sup>

The song continued as Rachel moved around the room, singing, playing, and correcting, never pausing for too long in any one place. As the song reached its peak, Rachel strummed her guitar, jumped up and down, her head rather near the ceiling as she sang,

“On, and on, and on, and on.”

Several of the boys in the class smiled as they watched their teacher rock. Rachel's infectious and seemingly endless energy continued as the class flew from one activity to the next.

Rachel, a conservatory-trained vocalist and pianist, taught herself guitar and African drumming over the course of her teaching career. After receiving her music education degree, Rachel worked two long-term substitute positions, teaching the curriculum of the existing teacher. In one of those settings, the teacher had designed the middle level general music curriculum as a series of three long-term performance-focused units. Rachel adopted this model when she began modifying the general music curriculum at her current school, from its long-standing “notebook focus,” six years ago. Rachel explained:

*When I got [this job] general music was a notebook. It was horrifying. [The general music curriculum] was a desk and a notebook and this woman [the former music teacher] had been there for like years, thirty-something years, so a generation of people know about this music notebook. I mean some of the stories about her music notebook, the notebook, everyone knew it; it was horrible! So of course I walk in there my first day before the kids came, I go downstairs to the Principal, and [say] ‘we’ve got to get rid of all the desks,’ and he’s like ‘what do you mean get rid of the desks?’ [I say,] ‘I can’t teach music with desks, get them out of here,’ so that was kind of the big change and I’ve just kind of been growing the program ever since and*

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<sup>27</sup>Opening lyrics for the Journey Song, “Don’t Stop Believin’” (Cain, Perry & Schon, 1981).



*now it's kind of – it's a highlight of the music department.*

In contrast to sitting at a desk with a notebook, Rachel's year-long seventh grade general music class focused on three performance-based units: African Drumming, Guitars, and Handchimes. Rachel used this approach as a way to get middle school students invested in actively making music together, a type of group belonging important in her teaching philosophy:

*My feeling is that I think it's important to make music for music's sake, but you have to know who your kids are—they don't want to do band; they don't want to do chorus; they don't want to do orchestra; they don't like music; they don't this [or that] and everything is so negative before they walk in the door and sometimes the teachers are like 'oh I hate this class;' it's so negative and all of a sudden you're like, alright we have a gig coming up; we have a performance coming up and it's—we're an ensemble; we're a team; they like that and it just clicks differently for them and they care about it; if they don't already care about music they care about being a part of something or performing or giving back to the community in some way. There is one aspect of performing that kind of gets them, that makes them care.*

Through her long personal history of participation in music ensembles, Rachel developed a personal belief that group belonging through music making was an important component of musical learning. In her district, the mandatory seventh grade music requirement meant that many students who were not interested in ensemble participation were required to take general music. Typically students only experience group belonging through participation in ensembles; however, Rachel extended this sense of belonging and teamwork to her seventh grade general music class by converting her class into three alternative ensembles during the course of the school year.

Yet, for those who find a place of belonging in Rachel's seventh grade general music classroom, there was no musical place for them (outside the traditional ensembles) as they moved forward in grade level. So Rachel developed and was piloting a high school rock guitar class during my visit, to extend the guitar knowledge and skills developed during seventh grade general music. Before this rock guitar class, she said that seventh grade general music was the "last stop on the [musical] train." According to Rachel, after seventh grade general music,

*[students] all get off and that's it, and I can't live with that. . . . I have to make sure that these kids have the opportunity to understand that there can be music in their life.*

Providing musical opportunities for *all* students was the general music challenge that Rachel tackled each day as she entered her seventh grade general music classroom, a challenge she passionately embraced.

### **The Circle of Courage**

Rachel's school, Washington Junior/Senior High, served all seventh through twelfth grade students in the rural district. The school enrolled a large number of poor students living on outlying farms or in the local mobile home community; approximately 70% of all students received free or reduced price lunches.<sup>28</sup> All five of the local elementary schools qualified for funding under Title I.

Rachel drew most of her classroom philosophy from a concept called the Circle of Courage, an approach to classroom management and child rearing designed to aid in the self-concept of "at-risk students," which she adapted for the middle level general music classroom during her masters degree project (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). During high school and college, she worked with special needs children and teens through a variety of

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<sup>28</sup>According to the US Census Bureau, 95% of the 2014 county population was white; the median household income for the county between 2009-2013 was \$47,151, while 14.7% of residents lived below the poverty line (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>).

organizations, including a local nonprofit that grounded its work in the Circle of Courage.

The Circle of Courage was developed from Native American beliefs about respecting children as individuals and raising children who develop independence but also mutual respect for others (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Brokenleg, 2005; Jackson, 2014; Morton, 2012; Van Bockern & McDonald, 2012). There are four main components that form the circle: generosity, independence, mastery, and belonging (Van Bockern & McDonald, 2012). According to Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern, “without belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity there can be no courage but only discouragement” (2002, p. 60). While there is much to critique, according to this philosophy, schooling or family life that does not foster courage leaves children “at-risk,” a modern predicament this philosophy hopes to overcome (Jackson, 2014).<sup>29</sup> Through group music making, Rachel fostered a general music learning community in which students *belonged* to the group, developed *mastery* in each musical form, moved toward *independent* music making, and finally shared their new skills *generously* with the community.

**Belonging.** Rachel believed that all students taking general music should find a place of belonging through performing as a group in her general music class. Just as traditional music ensembles provide a place of acceptance for many students, Rachel hoped to provide that same sense of inclusion in her general music classroom:

*I think when people feel like they belong to something they're more likely to step-up and be a part of whatever, be a part of anything, be a part of a class or an ensemble or a community or a family, or . . . having some sort of unified identity that I am a part of this is very meaningful. I think in that regard it just helps a lot I think, with just motivation,*

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<sup>29</sup>The Circle of Courage is the foundational philosophy for the nonprofit organization *Reclaiming Youth International* as well as the journal *Reclaiming Youth* (see <https://www.reclaiming.com/content/>).

*performance in the classroom, behavior management sometimes; not so much here [in the guitar unit] because we're doing mostly ensemble things, but with drumming and with bells it's like, 'Listen we have a performance next week, we really need you to play right now,' and that's different than, 'Stop fooling around, pick up your bell.'*

Much of Rachel's work as a teacher, both with students and colleagues, was about developing relationships and supporting others. She worked hard to cultivate relationships with students through common interests unrelated to music, like TV, and by attending school sporting events with her three-year-old son. Taking a moment to speak with each student at the beginning of class is one way she endeavored to connect with each student individually. During her years of teaching experience, Rachel has honed her approach to behavior management focused on the commitment of each student toward the group performance goal:

*So my job, and I'm really careful about this and this is something I've learned; I did not start off right off the bat doing this, but changing my language and that often has to go back to that Circle of Courage of positive language and making them feel as if they belong. So I very rarely will say, 'Hey cut it out' or like 'Stop fooling around;' I'll say instead 'Hey listen, I really need you right now; I know you can do it; let's pick up your guitar and play this chord.' It's just a really different language that I'm using and it draws them in a lot better, instead of that defiant attitude like 'Oh she's always yelling at me.'*

For Rachel, empowering students who enter her classroom to *belong* to the group was critical, particularly because of the developmental need of young adolescents to find where they fit in the school community.

*I think [middle schoolers] have a hard time figuring out where they belong. I think that*

*that's what middle school is about a lot of times, figuring out who you are and where you belong and they have so much drama because they're trying to figure out—'Do I fit in here?' 'Are these people better?' 'What is my goal in this group of people?' 'Am I the dumb one, am I the smart one, am I the funny one?'—its self-identity [they're] trying to figure out. But I think if I can at least provide some sort of sense of, well, you at least belong in this class and whoever you are you're safe in this class; you all belong in the same—working towards the same goal and I hope maybe that carries over.*

By developing relationships with her students, she cultivated a sense of inclusion in her classroom community. This sense of belonging and “safe space” in her general music classroom, fulfilled an essential young adolescent need, and helped seventh grade students know that someone cared about them as an individual.

**Mastery and Independence.** By spending the full year in seventh grade general music on only three musical styles, Rachel cultivated a musical learning community in which the goal was to develop mastery and independence in the musical style under study. By limiting her curriculum in this way, students delved deeply into the musical style and developed mastery on some, if not all, of the requisite skills. Rachel's longest unit, the guitar unit, extended from late fall until about spring break and allowed students time to develop skills and abilities as well as reflect upon their skill development. During my visit, Rachel asked the students to complete a self-reflection on their progress on guitar.

At the front of her seventh grade class, Rachel held up a stack of papers, “we have now reached the middle of the guitar unit. You are going to complete a short self-reflection, so you need a pencil.” Students scrounged around for their pencils or pens in their belongings while others grumbled, “I didn't bring a pencil.”

“You will need to rank yourselves on a one to five scale on eight questions. One equals just OK; five equals I’m awesome.”

“I’m awesome,” two boys at the front said simultaneously.

Rachel continued as if the student interruption never happened, “then use a complete sentence to answer the two questions at the bottom. Be sure to say something more than ‘I don’t know’ for your answer. The two questions are, ‘What is one thing that you did well during today’s class?’ and ‘What is one thing you think you need to work on?’”

She passed out the self-assessments. “I’m going to give you four minutes now and then we’re gonna play cuz I want to end today playing not writing.” Pencils scratched on paper as silence fell over the room. A few students looked around blankly, waiting for someone to be done so they could borrow a pencil.

As the students worked toward mastery of a particular musical style in general music, Rachel hoped that students would simultaneously move toward independent musical performance:

*Independence is where [general music students] don’t need me anymore. I can give them the music and they’re like oh yeah, I’ve got this, you know and that’s just part of every learning environment where you want to kind of be the one that sits all day with no teacher, so that’s what the independence part is all about. . . . That’s my goal for everybody, but not everybody gets there.*

Rachel encouraged this musical independence in both her general music classes and her two sections of middle level chorus. We were in the choir room during 8<sup>th</sup> grade chorus. Rachel stood behind the piano facing the students who stood on the risers. They were rehearsing “Cripple Creek” an American fiddle tune arranged by Emily Crocker; a song with rapidly sung

text. “Please say the text of your part in rhythm.”

Twenty-two students all began speaking their parts in a rhythmic chant. When they finished Rachel said, “Ok, now sing the song with that kind of energy.” They began the song again, but were momentarily interrupted when the classroom phone rang.

When Rachel returned to the class, a female student in the alto section said, “we should perform this as a rap.”

“Give me an example of what you mean.”

Two female students in the alto section began rapping the text in complementary parts. One of the four boys in the chorus suggested, “We could make a beat to go with the rap.”

“Yeah, we can totally make our own arrangement of ‘Cripple Creek.’ I’m digging it.”

A general chatter of excitement filled the room as ideas for the arrangement were blurted out from students in all sections of the chorus.

Later in class a male student suggested, “we could do both versions of ‘Cripple Creek’ at the concert, the original and then the class’ version.”

“We could do both versions at the concert, yes. But we would probably do our version first. Why don’t you take your music home and do something with it for next class.”

The alto who originally had the idea said quizzically, “really?”

“Really!”

At the end of class as the students were putting their music folders away on the rack, the male student who wanted to add beats to the rap worked on his beat boxing by repeating quickly “boots and cats and boots and cats...” as he walked past me to put away his folder.

The girl with the original idea was talking excitedly to Rachel about the rap. She seemed surprised that she was allowed to take her music home and perhaps more surprised that Rachel

would allow her to create her own version of the song.

Later I asked Rachel about this incident:

*I kind of liked it; I really did! I genuinely did; I thought it was awesome, yeah! You want to make this piece your own; let's do it. I would totally introduce it to the audience as like, hey, we introduced this song on the first day of the second semester and they really felt inspired that they should do a rap to this piece so this is what we came up with . . . [The students] were really into it! If this is going to make you love this piece and love coming to class let's do it. . . . I think [that was] just a typical middle school moment.*

Although mastery and independence were more difficult for general music students than those in chorus, Rachel hoped to provide students with the opportunities to gain these two aspects of musicality during each of the three music units of study in her general music class.

**Generosity.** Each seventh grade general music unit culminated with a public performance that allowed students to share their newly developed talents with the community. These performances typically took place at the kinds of venues where community service might occur: senior citizen centers, elementary schools, assisted living facilities, and other venues.

*The generosity part of it, that's the performance aspect. . . . A lot of these kids don't have very much to give [monetarily], they give this [musical performance] and it's something that is hopefully empowering for them that they can do that and do it through music, and if they like that feeling maybe they can do that in some other regard or continue it.*

By sharing their newly developed talent and skills with the community, both within the school and beyond, Rachel hoped to help middle level students see the benefits of generosity through community service. Many of Rachel's students possessed minimal monetary resources, but they could share their newly developed musical resources with the community and thus learn the



benefit of generosity toward others.

**“But I am a choir director”**

Although Rachel taught four sections of general music and only two choruses, Rachel identified herself primarily as a choral director. Rachel described her two reasons for identifying professionally in this way:

*The first one is because that is my major instrument, that's the place that is my comfort zone, and home. And I feel like, the second reason is because of this divide that I think happens in college where you're either an instrumentalist or a vocalist and there isn't that in between or another option. That you're either one OR the other. So I think that has become very much a part of my vocabulary and then I think because of that, if I were to introduce myself professionally and say, well I'm a general music teacher, I wouldn't get no respect.*

Rachel's purposeful use of improper grammar emphasized the lack of respect she perceived from musical colleagues in the larger music education community once they understood that she taught general music, only one part of her music-teacher identity.

*[General music is] so important but it's so hard and every time I tell someone I teach general music I get the eye roll, it's like 'Oh gosh,' or people say 'Oh when are you going to move up to the high school?' and brush it aside, like [general music is] less and it hurts my heart when they say that! Usually it's the band teachers, no offense, like 'When are you moving up to the high school?' Well what I'm doing is so important and I don't think that people understand the value of it and I do feel like I've learned that value [while teaching]; I wasn't taught that value [in preservice]. I think it was very much brushed over in college; I wish that it was taught because I don't think that many people*

*get it; I don't think they get it all! It's brushed aside and even now I still have to remind my colleagues sometimes that what I do is very hard, because they see all this great stuff [students learning instruments and performing in the community] but I'm sweating! You know? I'm busting my butt every day and I also know what it's like to teach an ensemble and it is wonderful and it is joyful and it is a breeze to teach that ensemble. Getting into that general music class is fun and exciting and great, but it is freaking hard! I think that it's overlooked a lot.*

Though Rachel often heard these types of comments from outsiders, she has spent each year at her school ridding her building of these attitudes through sharing her program and relationship building.

*My very first year, I started right away with the drumming and I did a performance five weeks after starting [at my school]. And I remember faculty and administrators coming up to me and saying 'You have done more in five weeks than the last teacher has done in the last 30 years.'*

School performances, coupled with a popular Guest Artist Series, have enabled Rachel to illuminate the successes and importance of general music and gain the respect of colleagues and administrators. During my visit, an Angus Young impersonator from an AC/DC tribute band visited and several colleagues, including one vice principal, attended the performance. Rachel's gregarious personality and hard work have enabled general music to gain a prominent place in Washington's music curriculum. Though she still thought of herself as a choir director, her commitment to the success of the general music program belied this self-identity.

## Beth

The blue linoleum tiles in the front entrance hall are in the shape of a cross. Each student walked over this linoleum cross to begin his/her school day, just as I did upon entering the building to meet Beth. “Good morning,” Beth greeted me, “I’ll show you around.”

Beth’s tour led me down the upper grades hallway of the T-shaped building toward the music room. The wide, clean corridor had blue lockers along one wall and student work depicting the life of Christ displayed on the opposite wall. The high ceilings and bright lighting made the building feel large and airy. Just as we reached the music classroom, the strains of a bugle call akin to “Reveille” sounded from the intercom system. “That’s our call to attention,” Beth told me. “It means it is time to go to Morning Prayer.”

We walked back towards the front entrance, made a left turn at the linoleum cross, walked past the school’s only bathrooms, and joined the many students and teachers headed in the same direction. The Student Center (gym/auditorium) was the size of two regulation basketball courts divided width-wise by a floor to ceiling screen. At the far end, near the curtained stage, a large projection of a PowerPoint slide was visible high on the wall.

Beth and I walked toward the front of the room past orderly rows of students and backpacks. The rows of younger students were surrounded by rows of older students while the eighth graders, divided by gender, were seated on two sets of bleachers. A small group of students stood at the front, each holding an object: the American flag, a basket holding special announcement notes, a jar filled with slips of paper, a bell, and a large binder containing the names of deceased family and friends of the school. Beth whispered in my ear, “feel free to participate at your comfort level, not everyone here is Catholic.”

“Good morning everyone,” the Vice Principal<sup>30</sup> greeted the gathered student body.

“Happy Monday. Let’s begin with some announcements.” When the Vice Principal acknowledged Beth, she introduced me to the whole school. Beth had told me that Sister, the school principal, described the teacher’s dress code as “relaxed decent,” and I was glad I had chosen, instead, to wear a professional-looking blouse and blazer as 400 pairs of student eyes swiveled in my direction. I gazed back at a sea of blue and grey plaid, pastel headbands, crew cuts, white polo shirts, sneakers, Ugg boots, and navy blue sweatshirts embroidered with students’ last names.

Morning Prayer moved on to the recognition of birthdays. Students celebrating birthdays came to the front of the room and received a birthday card and pencil. Then, the entire school sang “Happy Birthday.” I assumed that the birthday recognition was over at this point, but then the Vice Principal said, “and let’s bless them,” and the entire school began singing again:

Bless them<sup>31</sup>  
 Bless them  
 Bless them in the morning,  
 Bless them in the noontime,  
 Bless them  
 Bless them  
 Bless them when the sun goes down.

The school community sang this song to fit a variety of situations throughout my week at the school, not only for birthdays, but also for a teacher leaving on maternity leave. It was a school tradition to change the text of this song to fit a particular situation. Following birthdays, the entire school stood, the Vice Principal pulled a slip of paper from the jar, opened the

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<sup>30</sup>The vice-principal, in place since 2013, was a member of the teaching staff before becoming a member of the administration; while Catholic, she is not a nun. The longstanding principal, Sister, earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education and recently reached her 50 year anniversary as a member of the Precious Blood order, a liberal religious order devoted to ministerial work in schools, prisons, and other public institutions.

<sup>31</sup>The tune for this song comes from a traditional African American spiritual, currently published in the African American hymnal *Lift Every Voice & Sing II*. It is a commonly sung Christian children’s song, sung in both Catholic and Protestant traditions and is used with other lyrics such as the song “All night, all day.” To hear the tune of this song, visit this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NU5sZz8Pleo>

bereavement binder to review the appropriate information, and asked the students to pray specifically for a family on the prayer list. The Lenten Prayer, projected on the screen, was read aloud by all. The prayer ended, in Spanish (the foreign language taught at all grades), “*en el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo, Amen,*” as nearly everyone in the room crossed themselves. Morning Prayer ended with the Pledge of Allegiance and students were dismissed with encouragement to have a positive day.

As we walked out of the Student Center in a great crowd of students and teachers, Beth told me more about the K-8 nature of St. Mary’s. “We don’t really distinguish between elementary and middle school here, but we generally think of the fifth through eighth grades as middle level because fifth grade is when higher expectations and responsibilities begin for the students. We try to use the curriculum, their planners, and other duties to get them progressively ready for more responsibility over their own learning, and eventually, high school.”

Later, in the music classroom (Figure 5.2), I saw this expectation in action at the beginning of a class. As the students took their assigned seats in the choral chairs facing the Smartboard, a visible change in Beth’s body language occurred. She relaxed, exuding a different kind of calm, casual energy, just right for young adolescents. After a morning of high energy teaching physically demanding lower-elementary lessons that featured songs, games, stories, rhythm sticks, silly voices, “Deep and Wide,” and several conga lines, Beth shifted from the

Figure 5.2 *Beth’s Music Classroom*



carpet area to the opposite side of the room, turned her podium, and faced the fifth grade students in the “older student” section of the music classroom.

“When I call your name,” Beth began, “please hold up your music notation packet in your binder, your planner, and your pencil. Please and thank you.” One by one, student names were called, binders, planners, and pencils were held aloft, and Beth notated the completion of the task in the binder of class rosters she kept on the podium.

### **An Independent Catholic School**

St. Mary’s Catholic Elementary School, a private and independent Catholic school recognized by the local Archdiocese, was founded by parent volunteers who wanted a religious education for their children. Unlike many Catholic schools, the school was not directly linked to a specific Catholic Parish and was run instead by a board of trustees. Situated in a rapidly growing upper-middle class suburb,<sup>32</sup> the kindergarten class for the next two school years was already full. During my visit, the popular school was in the midst of a capital campaign to expand the facilities for a third time since its founding in 1998.

St. Mary’s serves all students meeting the admissions and tuition requirements, regardless of learning needs. According to Beth, students with learning disabilities are regularly enrolled, and the school prides itself on individualized student attention (a philosophy with which Beth, as a music therapist, readily agrees). To serve various student learning needs, the school employs a Reading Specialist, Counselor, Speech/Language Pathologist, and several Intervention Specialists. No academic or intelligence tests are part of the admissions process; however, students are accepted for admission based on a list of priorities specified by the board (including currently enrolled students, tuition deposits, legacy status, waiting list, and so on). In addition to

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<sup>32</sup>According to the US Census Bureau, 2010 Census, the median annual household income was over \$100,000 in 2010, the population had quadrupled since 1990, and over one quarter of the population was under the age of 14 (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>).

other typical school paperwork, each family completes a report on parish life, signed by the minister or priest, and a document specifying volunteerism in the community because the school requires parent volunteer hours as part of enrollment. While some scholarship money is available, ability to pay tuition, the documentation of regular church attendance, and completion of required annual volunteer hours are essential admission components for St. Mary's students.

### **Designing a School's Music Curriculum: The Curriculum Document**

Over the past twelve years, Beth has developed K-8 general music at St. Mary's from the guitar, songbook, and red wagon approach she used as she moved from room to room in her first year, to a nine-year curriculum featuring a plethora of materials and supplies. Beth's focus is on developing musical understanding over the weekly forty-five minute lessons and her curriculum document specifies three overarching musical goals:

- "Goal 1: Students will communicate knowledgably about musical compositions and performances;"
- "Goal 2: Students will recognize the influence and contributions of music to various cultures and societies;"
- "Goal 3: Students will express themselves musically, both individually and with others"<sup>33</sup>

This is Beth's second career; for fourteen years, she worked as a music therapist with children and adults with disabilities. When her family moved across the country, Beth began working with the choir at St. Mary's as a parent volunteer. She wrote a script for the Christmas program and expected that the music teacher would prepare the students for the musical

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<sup>33</sup>These three goals, along with the specific objectives for each grade level, were detailed in a curriculum document Beth wrote and has revised over her years teaching. Most recently revised in 2012, this document is quoted throughout this narrative. Beth intended to revise the document again after reviewing the 2014 National Core Arts Standards documents along with the recommendations from the Archdiocese.

components of the show.

*Well, it came time for dress rehearsal and the kids didn't know the music, like none of it! The Principal [Sister] was looking at me and I'm going—it's not my monkey, not my circus, you know, but we managed to pull it off. He [the music teacher] ended up getting fired over that and I got the job. At the time it was just supposed to be an interim deal until she found somebody and then she did some digging into my background and, because it was a private school, [my] music therapy [bachelor's degree] was considered an equivalency program to music education, so I kind of fell into the job.<sup>34</sup>*

As Beth developed the objectives and activities within her three goals, she drew on her background in music therapy, probably the most significant influence on her teacher identity. While each lesson had a goal or objective drawn from the curriculum document, Beth focused the lesson details on the individual needs of the students in a particular class.

*I look around the room and I think okay I've got a minimum of three, probably more like five or six different ways that I need to reach these kids in order to get everybody. I need to present this information across the unit of the next couple weeks in these different ways.*

According to Beth “[it is] my job to best know how to reach my students,” a responsibility she took seriously, often reciting the learning styles or individualized learning plan details of students before or after a particular class. Teaching students for as many as nine years enabled Beth to know minute details of how best to use music to reach each student in a particular class.

Beth's curriculum document was carefully printed and housed in a binder in the music

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<sup>34</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all italicized text is directly quoted from interviews recorded on December 30, 2014, March 26, 2015 or August 30, 2015. Beth's story was developed from 2:29 hours of recorded interviews, five full-day observations in Beth's classroom, and the collection of student and teacher generated artifacts during March 23-27, 2015.



classroom. However, the evolution of the document was a slow process of moving beyond “what the school thought [students] needed to know which was, well, keep them busy for forty-five minutes” toward “establishing the validity and value of music as part of the curriculum.” After Beth’s first semester, Sister sought to recruit Beth as the full-time music teacher, but Beth wanted to know more about how Sister valued music education within the greater curriculum:

*So then at the end of that [first semester] in May I sat down with Sister and she said, ‘so how about being our music teacher all the time?’ And I said, ‘Well, let’s talk about your philosophy – let’s start with your philosophy of education and then tell me how music fits into that and then I’ll let you know whether this is something I’m going to tackle or not.’ She didn’t have all of the answers I was looking for but she had enough of them that I thought this is somebody I can work with. [Sister] doesn’t recognize [the value of music education] just because she is unaware, not because she knows and doesn’t care.*

Once Beth convinced Sister that music education was beneficial to the total education of children from Kindergarten through eighth grade, Beth began her research and curriculum document development. The result of these years of work is an eclectic general music curriculum sequenced over nine years.

### **One Goal at a Time: Scenes from Middle Level General Music at St. Mary’s**

**“Goal 1: Students will communicate knowledgeably about musical compositions and performances.”** “You have probably seen these things that look like fractions in the music we’ve used here in class,” Beth said to the fifth grade students seated with notebooks before them. Pointing to the 4/4 time signature on the board, Beth continued, “This is a time signature. We already know what the top number means. Who can tell me?”

Hands rose into the air and Beth called on a girl in the first row. “The top number tells us

how many beats are in the measure, like we counted before.”

“Correct,” Beth said. “Now, the bottom number. When the bottom number is a 4, the quarter note gets the beat and when the bottom number is an 8, the eighth note gets the beat.

When the bottom number is a two, what note do you think gets the beat?”

Most students look puzzled, but a boy in the middle of the second row immediately raised his hand and said, “a half note.”

“Yes, that’s right. Daniel knows about this because he’s in the ensemble.”

“Let me explain it a different way.

The time signature is like a fraction. You’ve done fractions in math, right?” Some students nodded their heads while others groaned.

“Ok,” Beth continued, “a fraction is part of a

whole.” She used the red marker to write fractions and musical notes on the Smartboard (see Figure 5.3) while she spoke. “The number on the bottom of the time signature fraction tells you which note gets the beat. So, when you see a 4 on the bottom of the time signature, which note gets the beat?”

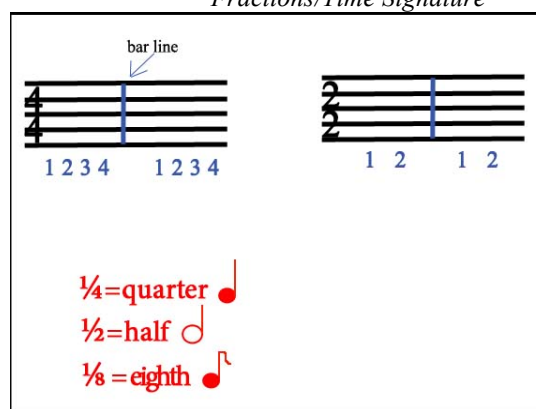
A student, silent until now, raised her hand and said, “the quarter note?”

“That’s it!”

Suddenly, several hands were up in the air. Student questions flew around the room as Beth entertained and answered each question. Each answer led to more hands in the air, more thoughtfully phrased questions, and further explanations.

“Now who understands?” Beth asked during a pause in the discussion. Nearly every

Figure 5.3 *Smartboard Content for Fractions/Time Signature*



student raised his/her hand. “Ok, so now let’s talk about when an 8 is on the bottom of the time signature. This is trickier because the eighth note gets one beat. How much did the eighth note get before when the bottom number was a 4?”

A student raised her hand and said, “half a beat.”

“Right,” Beth said, “but now the eighth note doesn’t get half a beat, but rather a whole beat. So how much would a quarter note get?”

Only Daniel raised his hand, “two beats,” he said confidently.

“Correct.” Before the words were out of her mouth, ten hands were in the air. The question and answer session began again. Beth tried to explain the concept from multiple angles by offering several more explanations. By the time the hands had tired, most of the students seemed to understand how beat values change in a time signature with an 8 on the bottom.<sup>35</sup> A couple of students were still unsure. To one of these students who peered at Beth inquisitively, Beth said, “don’t over think it, it’s a rule, just believe it.”

**“Goal 2: Students will recognize the influence and contributions of music to various cultures and societies.”** Strains of “Rock Around the Clock,” “The Twist,” and “I Get Around” emanated from the classroom speakers. The sixth grade music classroom electrified as students danced the Pony, Twist, and Hand Jive, their faces creased with smiles of enjoyment or puckers of concentration. Full of energy and excitement, the students practiced their previously learned choreography, many of them singing while dancing.

One of Sister’s expectations was that, by the time students graduated, they will have performed on stage in a program that required more than just choral singing. Beth had tried this required musical production in a variety of grade levels and finally decided it worked best in

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<sup>35</sup>According to what Beth has written in her document, fourth and fifth grade “students will identify complex meters (6/8, 5/4, 2/2).” By the use of the phrase “complex meters,” I am interpreting Beth to mean that students should have an advanced understanding of asymmetric, compound, and simple meter beyond common time.

sixth grade. This year, Beth and the students started the year with an overview of the music, dances, clothing styles, and current events in each decade featured in the selected production.<sup>36</sup>

This year-long unit of study was designed to develop students' knowledge of American popular music and dance within the context of United States history. Now, in March, the students were beginning to learn the dances and choreography for the music they had already learned to sing.

Suddenly the animated room became still as each boy stood next to a girl of equal height. Beth stopped the audio track and said, "I'm gonna' have to tell you what we're gonna' do and we're all gonna' say EWWW and then we'll be over it."

She paused, then said, "You are actually going to have to touch your partner."

"EWWWWWWWWW!!!" The silent room erupted with shouts, groans, and giggles in response to this newest revelation.

"Is there a brave guy who will come up and be my partner for a demonstration of what you need to do next?" A lone boy volunteered, moved to the front of the room, and stood next to Beth. "The guy has to put his arm around the girl's waist like this," Beth took her volunteer's right arm and placed it around her waist. "The girl puts her right hand on her hip and then you need to hold each other's left hands and turn in a circle like this."

Faces around the room contorted with nerves, disgust, fear, and amusement as couples attempted to master the dance step. Beth circulated the room coaching and encouraging each couple in turn. At one pairing, Beth stopped for a longer chat with the girl, who is partially paralyzed on the right side of her body. "How is going in a circle for you? If you need to, you can modify the step."

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<sup>36</sup>The 2014-2015 selected production was *Rock, Roll & Remember: A Tribute to Dick Clark and American Bandstand* (Emerson, 2013). According to Beth's curriculum document, sixth through eighth grade "students will recognize how the study of music/dance compliments [*sic*] the study of societies," an objective ideally suited to this "decades in-review" show.

“I think I’m ok.”

Beth turned to her partner, “You need to be extra aware of your partner and help her if she’s having problems with her balance.” The boy nodded seriously.

A disturbance at the back of the room attracted Beth’s attention. A male student down on one knee, clasped the hand of his partner, and asked loudly, “Please, please dance with me?” as his classmates looked on, amused. Embarrassed, his partner attempted to free her arm.

Beth moved towards the pair, “Kevin, stand up and see me after class.”

“But she won’t dance with me right.”

“Try it again.”

The boy stood up; Beth whispered to the girl, “No matter what he says, you’re doing fine.”<sup>37</sup>

**“Goal 3: Students will express themselves musically, both individually and with others.”** Seated on the floor, two by two, eighth grade students were sharing xylophones and bells. Beth started the 12-bar blues accompaniment track and all of the students followed the notation on the board and played their bells on the steady beat.

C, E, G, E | C, E, G, E | C, E, G, E, | C, E, G, E

F, A, C, A | F, A, C, A | C, E, G, E | C, E, G, E

G, B, D, B | F, A, C, A | C, E, G, E | C, E, G, E

Beth stopped the recording. “I don’t want you to just go thunk, thunk, thunk with the beat. You should try to make your improvisation more interesting. Use eighth notes and other rhythms.

Mix up the notes to make something interesting.”

The accompaniment restarted and students resumed their work. A girl at the front of the room seemed particularly confused so Beth knelt down to listen to the student’s question. Beth

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<sup>37</sup>Beth later told me that this female student was one of the lowest performing students in the grade. Beth wanted to build up this girl’s confidence, so she tried not to draw additional attention to the situation.

took the student's mallet and demonstrated an improvisatory example, varying the rhythms and notes, but keeping with the chord changes of the 12-bar blues. The student nodded her head and appeared much less confused following Beth's example.

A few minutes later, Beth stopped the recording. "I'm going to come around and hear everyone play their improvisation for a grade. I'm looking for three things: are you starting and stopping with the music and my cue, are you varying your notes, and are you varying your rhythms."<sup>38</sup>

Beth grabbed a post-it notepad and a pen from her desk as she restarted the accompaniment recording. She moved close to each student, gave each student her full attention in turn, and then praised each student with 'good,' 'ok,' or 'nice job.' As Beth listened to each student play, she noted his/her name in one of three columns (Plus, Minus, or OK) on her post-it.

### **Musical Understanding**

The three scenes of middle level general music at St. Mary's (above) illuminate the eclectic nature of Beth's general music curriculum. Beth believed quite strongly that general music was a musical appetizer, a sampling of musical content that students could choose to pursue further outside of general music. She prioritized student understanding<sup>39</sup> and intelligent discussion of music over the execution or performance of music.

*For the general music classes I kind of look at it as, I want them to be able to understand and participate and get it even if they don't love it, even if it's not their passion, even if*

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<sup>38</sup>According to Beth's curriculum document, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade "students will improvise melodies and rhythms." Beth wanted to see each student demonstrate his/her ability to improvise within the parameters of the 12-bar blues in order to assess student achievement of this objective.

<sup>39</sup>Beth's approach to general music as developing musical understanding is similar to what Eisner (2002) calls the "visual culture" approach to arts learning, "efforts to help students learn how to decode the values and ideas that are embedded in" the arts (p. 28). Beth's musical understanding focus, which introduces students to many musical genres and musical practices, is also similar to the comprehensive musical content that "enables students to develop their awareness of the roles that music encompasses in their culture" advocated by Reimer (2003) in his new vision for general music.

*they can't execute the [musical] scales. I want them to be able to listen to everything from a heavy metal band to a chamber ensemble and know whether or not it's good and why. . . . My hope is that by the time they leave me in eighth grade they can say, I like the way the string orchestra did this; I like this crescendo, instead of yeah, they got louder there.*

She compared general music to her personal love of football. Beth described how she could not play football herself, though she knew the basics, but that she knew when the team was doing well or not and she enjoyed cheering on her favorite teams. *“That’s what I want for [the students]—to come out of general music with me, so they can love [music] even if they can’t do it.”* For Beth, sustained musical performance and the ability to read musical notation fluently were the purview of ensembles courses, which students could choose to take as after school activities. While some performances were required by the administration and she introduced musical notation and related concepts, Beth’s primary objective in general music was to introduce students to a wide range of musical knowledge and content and develop skills within the three goals specified in her curriculum document.

## Sarah

Eighth grade girls sing the blues . . .

*I aint got no long shorts (no I don't)  
They don't sell them in stores (no they don't)  
I got pulled out of class . . . cuz I was showin' my uh . . . SKIN!*<sup>40</sup>

Students streamed into and out of the narrow general music classroom on an unusually warm afternoon in early spring at Adams Junior High, a large suburban public school serving grades 7 and 8.<sup>41</sup> As a group of four girls came into the room and took their seats, two of them pushed their shorts low on their hips, slouched down, and positioned music stands directly in front of their legs. “Get our stuff for us,” one of the girls whispered to her friend as she “hid” her legs behind her music stand. Their appropriately dressed friend collected their materials from the cart at the front of the room and the girls got to work on their project—lyrics for a 12-bar blues song. Concerned that the length of their shorts violated the school dress code, these girls wrote the lyrics that began Sarah’s narrative as a starting place for their song.

As the tardy bell rang, the last of the students arrived, found their group, collected their supplies, and began working. They turned their chairs and repositioned music stands in order to collaborate

Figure 5.4

*General Music Classroom at Adams Junior High*



<sup>40</sup>These and other blues lyrics included in this document were written by students enrolled in one of Sarah’s seven sections of eighth grade guitar during their first or second class period working on this composition project.

<sup>41</sup>According to the US Census Bureau, the median household income from 2009-2013 was \$72,683 and in 2010, 91% of the population was White while 27.4% of the population was under 18 years of age (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>).



with classmates. One student collected his assigned guitar from the guitar wall (Figure 5.4) and played it as he worked with his group in the composition process. The sounds of softly strummed guitar chords mixed with student chatter and laughter as brainstorming and lyrical composition ensued.

“This is literally the only class that I actually like,” said a student near me to his classmate. His group was focused on brainstorming topics for their blues song. The topics suggested were amusing, logical only to the young adolescent mind: hide and seek, fried chicken, mixtapes, corn dogs, and stealing tea. Nearby another group of three boys quickly composed one verse about having to write a blues song:

*We have to write a blues song  
We have to write a blues song  
We think it's really wrong*

“What should we say next,” one of the boys asked his group members. Their responses were drowned out by a sudden burst of laughter from six girls located across the room. Animatedly they discussed the recent, heartbreaking news that Zayn was leaving One Direction. This was assuredly an announcement that gave them the blues. As they brainstormed, the girls decided that in the last verse of their song, they will say that they are “over” Zayn. One group succeeded in the day’s task and composed three full verses of their blues song, although not yet in the proper form:

*I hate the blues  
We're forced to sing  
Them always so sad  
Them makes me mad*

*I hate this school  
It makes me drool  
I wanna go home  
And get on my phone*

*My head is achin'  
 My souls a breakin'  
 I need a nap  
 I feel like crap*

Class ended and each group returned their assignment worksheets, on which they had written brainstorming and lyrics, to the cart at the front of the room. I walked up to the cart to review the student work and Sarah materialized at my elbow. “Want to see what the other periods wrote, too?”

### **Adams Junior High**

Sarah’s school, Adams Junior High, serves all seventh and eighth grade students enrolled in the district. Over 1,000 students attend the school. The school building is in sight of the sixth grade center, the high school, and the district offices. All four buildings sit atop a small hill surrounded by plowed fields. Each morning, the walk from the front entrance to the music wing took nearly five minutes as I looked around at displays outside classrooms and hoped I was making all of the correct turns through the hushed, clean hallways, empty of students. As a visitor at Adams Junior High, I tried not to get lost, as I made a succession of turns following one hallway to the next. For me, the long hallways of this well maintained, large school facility were comforting in their familiarity.

In contrast to my experience with the building, Sarah’s own experience of Adams Junior High is quite different.

*I’m always a little more intimidated about the size of our school than probably the grade level[s I teach] because we’re just so huge. I come from a very small, rural area where we consolidated. Prior to consolidation, there were fifteen kids in my class; after there were fifty-four [in my graduating class]. . . . So living in this area and teaching this many students is still mind-boggling to me many times.*

A large mural featuring theatrical masks, musical instruments, and other artistic signifiers was painted high on a black wall near the auditorium welcoming students and adults to the arts wing. During my weeklong visit with Sarah, my experience shrank to the arts wing as Sarah and I rarely ventured beyond the boundary denoted by the mural. Even our lunch was eaten in the band or choir room with the other music teachers. Because this was only her second year at this school, Sarah was still getting to know the school community.

In the music hallway, Sarah's classroom is connected by a closet to the other general music classroom where another music teacher teaches the nine-week "exploratory," 7<sup>th</sup> grade guitar, required of all students. Across the hallway from the general music room are a series of doors leading to a secluded hallway connecting practice rooms, the choir room, and a large band room capable of being divided into two equal rooms via an accordion wall. Each music room is fully equipped with musical instruments, technology, soundproofing, and other trappings of a large public school capable of outfitting the building with quality supplies.

### **Project-Based General Music**

Sarah began her music teaching career as a band director after graduating from her preservice undergraduate program as a bassoonist. Of her early career she said, "in the beginning of my career I thought I would be a band director forever."<sup>42</sup> However, the life of an ensemble director left her with little time for her growing family. After three jobs focused on concert band, choir, and pep band in various grade configurations, Sarah accepted a position teaching K-8 general music and discovered that she "really didn't know what [she] was doing." So she decided to take professional development workshops in Orff and Kodály pedagogies.

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<sup>42</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all italicized text is directly quoted from interviews recorded on January 15, 2015, April 1, 2015, April 2, 2015, or August 5, 2015. Sarah's story was developed from 3:41 hours of recorded interviews, four full-day observations in Sarah's classroom (and a half-day in her colleagues' classrooms), and the collection of student and teacher generated artifacts between March 30 and April 3, 2015.

*The Kodály and Orff training really changed how I looked at teaching and I really became—I loved teaching general music as much as I loved teaching band and I loved that I got to teach my own two sons as they got up into those grade levels.*

When she took the 2013-2014 opening at Adams Junior High, it was her third general music position, her fifth position overall in an eleven year career.

*It was the guitar [focused curriculum] that made me apply because I've been playing guitar since I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and I thought it would be interesting and fun. And it was interesting, but it was also a struggle last year because there is a lot I realized I didn't know, so then I went to one of the GAMA [Guitar and Accessories Marketing Association] workshops where they teach about guitar and it was kind of like oh, duh, apply your Kodály-slash-Orff training to the guitar and here's a few extra tools for you to help you teach guitar. So this year I feel like my students have already learned almost three times what my students last year learned.*

Sarah's professional development experiences broadened her ability to teach music to all students and enabled her to think about the forms of music education that exist beyond the ensemble classroom.

The experiential and discovery learning techniques found in Orff and Kodály pedagogies influenced Sarah's decision to focus her seventh grade general music course (described below), on a project-based curriculum. Her eighth grade guitar course (described above) also featured elements of project-based learning interspersed with advanced guitar pedagogy. Seventh and eighth graders in the district were all required to take a music course, so if they chose not to participate in band or choir, they then took general music in seventh grade and general music (taught by another teacher) or guitar in eighth grade. Sarah chose a project-based focus because

there was no performance requirement in either course, a change from the K-6 general music taught in the district.

*If [the students] don't want to perform I feel like we should be informing their brains and making them think about the music and to me that's where they're appreciating it as a listener rather than as a performer. It's something that I think helps them with—it might help them with understanding that they are looking at music from a different viewpoint than as a performer.*

Sarah's goal for her young adolescents was to teach the students life skills, such as responsibility, respect for musical instruments, and ownership of one's own work. When students forgot their supplies or complained about work, Sarah responded: *train your brain!* Her hope was that she provided them with skills that prepared them for the future while simultaneously teaching them about music without the pressure of public performance.

*I try to teach them about life and responsibility and life skills and training their brain, and being respectful and responsible to each other through music. The music is the way I teach it, but I'm really teaching the student about life.*

At the front of the seventh grade general music class Sarah held up a student handout with a rubric as she finished describing the difference between the two composition options: ABA and ABC. Sarah paused and pointed to the charts at the back of the room, "you will see that there are six more class days, one of which is a Wednesday, to work on this project until the due date. Please use your class time wisely. I'm happy to help if you have any questions." As Sarah finished her last reminder, twenty-four pairs of headphones flew from necks to heads, iPads were opened, and the students were off to work on their projects. The whole-class instruction portion of this class lasted less than ten minutes of the forty-five minute period. iPad

screens and the unheard musical compositions became the focus of class as Sarah faded into the background, just as she had in the guitar class previously described, coming forward only when called upon by a student.

In front of me, three boys rearranged the chairs so they were seated in a row with their chairs pushed close together. They were seated facing away from me, so I was able to see their iPad screens. One of the three boys tapped his foot as he used the Smart Guitar feature to record his careful playing of different chords. He stopped recording and then started again, nodding his head as he listened. The other two boys were clearly off task as they tried to make the most outlandish sounds possible using the Garage Band technology. They were not using their headphones and everyone around them could hear the absurd clashing noises they were creating with their iPads. Sarah moved over to this group of boys and spoke softly to the two noisy ones. “Please don’t make me manage your behavior for you. Put your headphones on properly and get to work.”

A student across the room raised her hand and asked, “Can you listen to mine?” “Absolutely,” Sarah responded as she plugged in the headphones she was wearing around her neck. Pushing play on the recording Sarah exclaimed, “You’re gonna’ make me go deaf.” As she turned down the volume, the student smiled. Sarah tapped her foot against the music stand as she listened to the student’s song. “It sounds like eighties music,” she said, removing the headphones and looking at the student’s rubric.

As she checked the rubric, Sarah played the student’s composition aloud. A student across the room removed his own headphones to listen. “That’s nice music!” Embarrassed, the girl who created the music giggled with her neighbor and continued to wait for Sarah’s comments. “I’m just checking you off here in case your work gets lost before you finish; you

still need a melodic instrument.”

“What do you mean?” Sarah knelt down to explain.

Two students sitting together across the room switched iPads and listened to each other’s compositions. “Question, how’d you get the Smart Drum to sound so good?” Her neighbor leaned over her iPad to show her what she used. Using one iPad, the two students shared their independent discoveries of Garage Band’s capabilities with each other.

As I looked around the room, this kind of peer sharing was occurring throughout the room, some of it silently, sometimes with students speaking to each other in soft voices. Occasionally, a student would cross the room to share with a friend. After working together for a few minutes, students returned to working on their own projects. There was flexibility in this work time and movement around the room that allowed for peer-to-peer support and mentoring, which allowed Sarah to spend more time with students who needed concentrated help or to check the progress of others.

### **Purpose and Task in Project Based Learning**

One challenge Sarah faced this year was the number of administrative initiatives instituted throughout the course of the school year, many of which challenged the goals she was trying to achieve in her project-based curriculum. The school had a delayed start and compressed schedule for students on three Wednesdays a month in order to hold regular, early morning faculty meetings. In addition to this, the school received a grant to give some veteran teachers a break from teaching students in order to become “instructional coaches” for other teachers. Sarah counted 40 new initiatives and responsibilities that teachers were asked to incorporate into their work, within and beyond the classroom walls, this school year.

One of these new administrative initiatives was the posting of the Purpose and Task<sup>43</sup> on the whiteboard in the classroom. During the faculty meeting I attended as part of my observation, the teachers were told that they were doing well on posting the Purpose and Task, but now it was expected that these statements would change every day. Following this newest directive, Sarah and two of her music colleagues discussed the feasibility of this in music and then broached the subject with their assigned instructional coach. Sarah was particularly concerned about the expediency of daily changing the Purpose and Task statements during one of her project-based units. Sarah tried to explain that project-based curriculum means that students are working long-term on a particular project and that all students are in a different place on a particular day. The instructional coach said that he understood what she was describing, but restated the administrative expectation that Purpose and Task should change every day. Later, Sarah described the situation:

*I'm grateful for what I've been given because I like that it's not performance and I like that it's project-based and I like [that] I pretty much have free rein to say 'Hey this is what I'd like to do; this is where I think they'd like to go' and then I bounce it off [the 8<sup>th</sup> grade general music teacher] and he's like 'Yeah, that sounds good to me.' It feels like they're listening to you as a professional because you've experienced knowing what you need from music, and that may or may not be the case, but at least they're letting you have that free rein to choose what you're doing in the class and to say this is good for my kids and they're not questioning that. . . . You write your purpose and your task and get it up there [on the board] and they look at it and go oh yeah, okay and you're set. . . .*

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<sup>43</sup>At Adams Junior High, the administration asked teachers to use part of their classroom whiteboard to write a statement of purpose for each lesson along with the task or tasks students would complete that day. This requirement is just one interpretation of a common public school policy focused on holding teachers accountable by requiring the lesson goal posted prominently in the classroom (see also Wiggins, 2013).



*This is probably the most freedom of curriculum that I've had and it's nice not to have that over your shoulder. . . . If somebody would ask, 'Well why did you do it completely different this year?' Well, 'I went to a workshop and I learned this or I was researching and I found this and I decided to add it,' and I think that's all I would have to say.*

After the faculty meeting, Sarah removed the Purpose and Task tape on the whiteboard and created it anew in order to enlarge the writing space (Figure 5.5). She tried rewriting her Purpose and Task statements.

Sighing, she turned from the board to me and said, "I just don't see how these can change everyday, especially with the Garage Band project."

"I know what you mean, even if the administration doesn't."

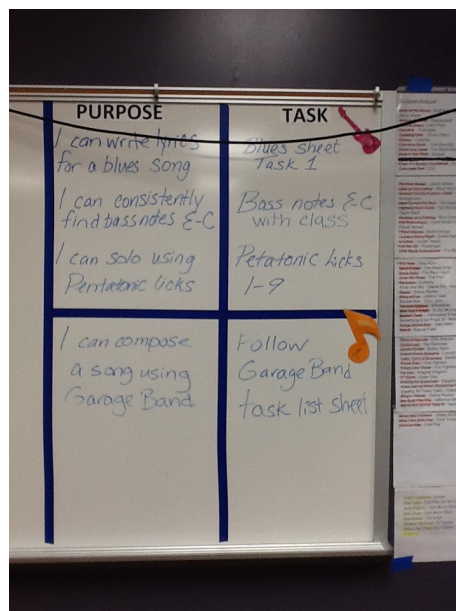
"Really, each kid needs a Purpose and Task statement, but that's not realistic."

"Maybe you should change it when you think it is right and take a photo each time you change it."

"I like that idea."

Armed with the photographic evidence, Sarah could meet (as required) with her instructional coach to discuss whether or not she was changing her statements accurately and with adequate frequency to meet the administrative demands. Hopefully this change would allow her to remain true to her project-based curriculum approach while potentially generating a productive conversation with the administration about her approach to middle level general music.

Figure 5.5 Sarah's Rewritten Purpose and Task Statements



## Michael

*SMACK!*

“That kid just threw a snowball directly at the car,” said Michael seated in the driver’s seat. I looked over my shoulder and saw a young girl running back to the shelter of the high-rise apartment building on the left side of the narrow urban street. “Do you see the parent in the doorway cheering the child on?” he asked.

I looked again and could just see the outline of two figures through the heavily falling snow. Michael shook his head and laughed at the absurdity of a parent encouraging a child to hit a passing car with a snowball in rather treacherous wintry conditions. Michael’s Northeast school district had called a snow day, so since I had just arrived, he invited me to join him on some errands as he prepared for the school week. As we drove around town, Michael took me through a neighborhood called “The Hill,” home to many of the students who attend the city’s public schools.<sup>44</sup>

We reached the end of the steep street without further snowball incidents and turned right. We passed a school building with a bright blue entrance and drove on toward the red brick facades of old factories that occupied the next few blocks. Pointing out the window, Michael said, “That elementary school was one of two schools taken over by the state last school year. The entire district is in danger of being taken over next school year, primarily because our test scores and the students’ English proficiency are so low.”<sup>45</sup>

“What changed after the takeover? Did the teachers keep their jobs?” I asked.

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<sup>44</sup>According to the US Census Bureau, in 2010 a quarter of the city’s population was under 18 years of age and nearly half of the population was Hispanic or Latino. From 2009-2013, the median household income was \$31,628 while 31.5% of the population lived below the poverty level (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>).

<sup>45</sup>According to 2014-2015 district statistics, 78.8% of enrolled students were Hispanic. Nearly 30% of students were English Language Learners and for nearly 50%, English was not their first language. The state board of education designated the district as “underperforming” in 2003, a designation that has held since that time.

“They brought in a company to run the school. Teachers had to reapply for their jobs, if they wanted to stay. But if they stayed, they wouldn’t be in the teacher’s union because the school isn’t in the district anymore. So most teachers stayed with the union.”

“Where did those teachers go?”

“They had to be reassigned, if they had professional status. In addition, one music teacher retired last year. I don’t have professional status yet, so as the district moved around teachers with professional status, I was one of several young teachers who got fired.”

“How did you get your job back?”

“Well, that’s how I ended up teaching at two schools. Rick (the music department chair) went down to the superintendent’s office to tell him he’d made a big mistake. Rick is well respected as the high school choir director, so the superintendent listens to him. He told the superintendent that if he had just been consulted, he would have explained how best to reassign the music teachers. Rick didn’t want my choir program at Kennedy School to die, it’s the first middle school choir in the district, so they reshuffled me. I kept 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade general music and the choirs at Kennedy but they added K-6 general music and a new after school 6-8 choir at Jackson. So I got my job back, but it isn’t the same job.”

A few minutes later, Michael drove past another school, a large, imposing, two-story red and brown brick building, constructed in a previous era. “This is one of the now unused middle school buildings in the district,” he said. When I talked with Michael back in December about visiting, he told me that the district closed all middle school buildings a few years before he became an employee. “Remember I told you about the falling enrollment because some parents are pulling their kids out of the public schools? Because of this, all of the middle school buildings are closed and all of the elementary schools are now K-8.”

“What are they doing with the building now?”

“Nothing.”

As we drove on, Michael said, “pay attention to the bathrooms on your visit to Kennedy. When the district decided to move the middle schoolers into the elementary buildings, they didn’t think about the fact that the boys and girls bathrooms faced one another without the privacy of a main entrance door. The kids could see into each other’s bathrooms. The water fountains, sinks, and stuff are also built for kindergarteners, not eighth graders. Other teachers have told me that in the first year of K-8 consolidation the middle schoolers didn’t even have the right sized desks.”

Michael was in his fourth year of teaching at the time of my visit. A pianist, vocalist, and guitarist, he taught piano lessons and substitute taught for two years after graduating from a small, private college in 2009. Although he works as both a choir director and a general music teacher, Michael identifies most of all as a creative musician:

*I had a phenomenal, phenomenal student teaching experience. . . . I remember kind of having this existential college crisis, this one day coming in and saying, ‘You know, I’m not sure if I’m made to teach.’ And [my cooperating teacher] kind of took me aside and was like, ‘You can do this.’ . . . He showed me all this stuff that he was working on and he was like, ‘There is nothing wrong with seeing yourself as a musician first and as a teacher second, and it’s totally fine to say that I’m a creative person before I’m a teacher.’ Some people might not understand that; they might say well you don’t care about kids and I certainly do, but I enjoy picking up a guitar and writing a piece of music and I enjoy listening to the types of music that I listen to. . . . I don’t necessarily feel guilty about that and I think that that can be music education too. And to have another*

*teacher kind of come alongside you and say, ‘You can teach in this way and you’re going to reach a lot of kids who normally feel kind of like the outlier kids in music classes.’*

*That was a really big experience for me.*<sup>46</sup>

Michael began his first full-time teaching position at Kennedy School (a K-8 school) during the 2011-2012 school year. Teaching from a cart, he moved from one middle school room to another. Classroom teachers were resistant to him using their classrooms, so each quarter of the year, he would be forced to find a new “home” for each of his classes.

*I would spend the marking period<sup>47</sup> teaching in one classroom and then after that marking period I’d get switched to an entirely different room because teachers with their prep times wanted to use their own rooms, so they made it that I had a kind of a shifting classroom. So every classroom was different; for instance, I had some classrooms where the chairs were free from the desks so if I wanted, you know, to be in circles or rows or whatever I could do that. In some of those classes I could physically [move chairs and desks] but the teacher did not want me to do that, or the layout of the room was just so bizarre that it was, you know, [impossible]. I also had rooms where the chairs are connected to the desks. . . . We did chorus in these rooms and there might be twenty desks and I might have thirty-something kids.*

Michael has never had his own classroom. One day during my visit, as we were straightening the classroom at Jackson School, I said, “it would be so nice if you were over at Kennedy at the end of the day and could ‘reset’ your room for tomorrow.” Michael looked at me as though I had

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<sup>46</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all italicized text is directly quoted from interviews recorded on December 30, 2014, February 12, 2015, or August 19, 2015. Michael’s story was developed from 2:32 hours of recorded interviews, four full-day observations in Michael’s classroom (and an additional day in Michael’s car), and the collection of student and teacher generated artifacts between February 9 and February 13, 2015.

<sup>47</sup>Michael uses the term “marking period” to refer to a portion of the school year between two report cards. In this case, report cards are sent out on a quarter system.

spoken in a foreign language.

### **Three Classrooms, Three Curricula, Two Schools Before Lunch**

A Styrofoam bowl, plastic spoon, and two unopened packets of instant oatmeal sat on a piano keyboard on the stage of the cafeteria. The smells of poorly cooked cafeteria breakfast wafted through the room. The clatter of trays mingled with English and Spanish as students, both older and younger, arrived to school, met their friends, and ate breakfast. Michael hustled around the stage preparing for his second period class and meeting individually with students. Amid the ever-present aroma of student breakfast, Michael's own breakfast was delayed for the more urgent matters of the moment.

**Kennedy School Classroom #1.** “They cancelled the library program throughout the district,” Michael told me as he carried his oatmeal, backpack, and some musical equipment from the cafeteria stage to the now abandoned library, “so this is where I teach 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade general music as well as sixth grade chorus. I can't have 6<sup>th</sup> grade chorus on the stage because the elementary students are still eating breakfast during first period.”

I looked around the horseshoe shaped room as Michael checked some supplies (see Figure 5.6). A rounded wall jutted into the classroom space, before extending upward to the second floor landing of the library. All of the mix and match furniture was placed haphazardly throughout the room in no discernable pattern or organizational system. A tiny, child's size whiteboard on a wheeled easel was the only space for teacher writing in this room. A black

Figure 5.6 *Library-classroom at Kennedy School*



metal music stand and a piano keyboard sat in front of the librarian's desk, the only evidence that this was a music classroom.

Suddenly and noisily, though I heard no bell, students entered the library-turned-music-room en masse. They milled about the room searching for their groups from last class. "Mister," a student said over the ruckus, "our table isn't here."

"Somebody moved the tables," Michael answered, "hang on a minute." General confusion occurred for a few minutes as Michael circulated the room, moved students, and created a workspace for each group.

"Ok, ladies and gents, can I get your attention?" The chatter died down only a fraction. "Can you turn your chair to face me?" Most students complied, although one student, reading something written in a composition notebook he brought with him, did not turn his chair. Michael moved over and asked the student to turn his chair. The student rolled his eyes and turned his body, not his chair, halfway to the front, his notebook opened in his lap.

"Ok, so today we will continue . . ." Three male students noisily entered the classroom late and interrupted Michael in his instruction. "Find your groups please. Last time you were working on your movie scenes and soundtracks. Today you need to develop a description for at least one scene in your movie. What is the word to describe when music relates to something in the scene?"

"Cue" came the answer from around the room.

"Right. Remember as you write each scene, you need to describe the specific action in the scene that tells when the music will play and then name the specific piece of music. If you want, you can change the names or gender of the characters in the movie summary I gave you if it makes sense for your choices. For example, if you want to use all Spanish music, then you can

change the names of the characters to Spanish names.”

“As you think about what to write today, I want to read you a scene description that a group submitted last class. It is a good description because it has lots of details.” In the scene that Michael read to the class, a kid steals a candy bar and the musical cue the students chose was MC Hammer’s “Can’t Touch This.” “This is a great musical cue,” Michael said. “It is very appropriate for the scene.”

Amid the buzz of student chatter, Michael passed out materials to the groups and the students began talking and working animatedly. A group of boys near me discussed plot points of their action movie, further

developing the basic summary

Michael wrote as a starting

place for the assignment (see

Figure 5.7). The noise-level

rose as Michael and the special

education teacher’s aide

circulated the room to guide

students. Michael moved to the group of boys near me to check on their progress. As they had nothing written on their notebook paper, Michael said, “explain to me what’s happening in this scene.”

The students spoke excitedly in tandem, describing a dramatic action scene in which two guys are fighting in a helicopter over some kind of gadget. Michael knelt down next to the group so he could listen over the din of the rest of the class. “What’s the song for this scene?” The boys looked at one another and shrugged. “I like this scene and where you are going with this.

Figure 5.7 *Action Movie Scenario Written by Michael*

**MOVIE TITLE:** One If By Air, Two If By Sea  
**GENRE:** Action  
**SYNOPSIS:** Main character Jason - an ex-Marine – moves to quiet rural town in after being dishonorably discharged from the military. He becomes disheartened and depressed, but is befriended at a local coffee shop by a techie named Arnie, and they become roommates. Arnie begins to notice there are strange people arriving in this small town and begins to uncover leaked documents on the web pointing to something strange with Jason. It turns out that there is a conspiracy to frame Jason, but no one knows for what. Together, they begin to follow the paper trail to get to the bottom of the catastrophe that is about to occur and stop it from happening, sending them on a dangerous mission to Washington DC to save themselves, an Air Force pilot named Austin, and the fate of the nation.



Now try to discuss a song that matches the intensity of the scene.” Michael moved on to work with other groups, continually encouraging them to write in more detail what they had spoken aloud.

Supplies dictated Michael’s curricular decisions, particularly for general music. At Kennedy School, only a monthly supply of one ream of paper and pencils were available for Michael’s sixth and seventh grade general music class, requiring his creativity in designing lessons and materials. For example, in order to watch YouTube movie clips at the beginning of the movie music unit, Michael taped together several pieces of butcher paper to create a makeshift screen to hang in the library-classroom.

*When it comes to general music, like I said, I think the kids are naturally attracted to bright, shiny things with bells and whistles and lots of sounds on them [piano keyboards or other musical equipment] and that’s maybe a here [in this district] thing or maybe not; I don’t know, but I think kids are—generally speaking most kids everywhere are pretty hands-on and pretty visual and pretty physical when it comes to [young adolescents]. . . but then at [Kennedy], for instance, where those resources are not available, . . . I want to play to the social aspect, and I think that you play to those interests and to kids making sense of their life-world. . . . For instance with the project that we’re doing right now with the movie [soundtracks], getting to see something that maybe before they were made to feel this is not educational and this has no connection to the “real world” and getting them to see hold on a second, this does have real life application. This can be put into an educational context and we can use this to really think about how what we’re listening to affects plot development and tie it into things that are just so educational. I don’t understand how [other music teachers] wouldn’t want to do that. And then you tie into the career thing; you tie into the social aspect thing, so that is kind of the direction*

*that I think that you especially want to go when you don't have the shiny things that make kids go 'ooh' and 'I want to touch that.' Then it's really critical you get to know them and you find out how to find things that make these kids tick and that will make them say, I never thought of it like that.*

When class ended, Michael collected his unopened oatmeal, backpack, and a stack of materials. We exited the library and headed back toward the cafeteria for second period.

**Kennedy School Classroom #2.** Michael's uneaten breakfast was back on the cafeteria piano keyboard. The stage itself was packed with over fifty chairs in three rows, arranged in an L shape along two walls. Piles of lost and found items, janitorial equipment, and cafeteria trashcans decorated the space (see Figure 5.8).

The members of the Kennedy School seventh and eighth grade choir were singing Michael's choral arrangement of Taylor Swift's "Blank Space." Michel strapped on his guitar and said to the students, "If it's not a guitar, it's not really Taylor Swift."

Michael restarted the piano accompaniment track he recorded earlier and began to play the accompaniment on his guitar. The students began singing the song again, more enthusiastically, encouraged by Michael's accompaniment that evoked the radio version.

Creating arrangements of pop songs, like Taylor Swift's "Blank Space" for his chorus is a big part of Michael's practice because he believes students' music should be included in the music classroom. In his own school music experiences, he was told that his music did not

Figure 5.8 *Cafeteria-stage Classroom at Kennedy*



belong in school and he does not want his students to experience this.

*I think what we need to do is bring [students' music] into [the music room] and start from there, and I think that is the entry point for those kids into music education and from there you can get a kid from Jay Z to Mozart; it's all about the entry point of what interests them and what makes sense in their constructive understanding of music education.*

Michael wanted students to become engaged in music education and he thought that it was important to do so with whatever music reached them, a lesson he learned his first year teaching.

*This probably was January [of my first year] and this was after like nothing working from September to December and then [we sang] "Where is the Love" [by the Black-Eyed Peas]. [I thought] let's stick with this love theme because middle schoolers are big in the love theme, and we went to "Seasons of Love" [from Rent] from there and then they started singing. I remember there was this one class where the kids were singing and it was working, and I think that was the first point where I felt like OH WOW this isn't hopeless. We found something that works and then it was like a mad dash to see what else was going to work; why did it work, and it became like a game of clues where you were just running around trying to figure that all out.*

Building on the "Seasons of Love" interest, Michael moved the class into an extended Broadway research project. He discovered that working in groups with peers, researching and thinking together, was a positive learning experience for his students. "I think that you have to gauge your students; I think that's a big local thing." According to Michael, "the students come in [to class] and sometimes there is this perception of . . . the student looking at the teacher saying 'oh that's the grown-up school music and my music is out here,'" separate and outside of school.

At the end of class, an eighth grade student asked Michael, “How did you play those chords for the Taylor Swift song?” Michael showed him each chord slowly on the guitar and named it, “D major, B minor, E minor, G major.” The student nodded as Michael presented each chord. Then the student moved behind the keyboard to play the chords starting with the ones he already knew. Michael talked him through the chords, “B minor – B, D, F-sharp.” After Michael helped him through each chord, the student played through each in succession, trying to remember what Michael had taught him and beginning to play in the rhythm of the accompaniment track. Although it was time for Michael to rush to his classes at Jackson School, he sacrificed his minuscule prep and travel time to nurture a student’s interest.

**Jackson School Classroom #3.** Michael’s first class at Jackson School began each day at 10:30 am. Theoretically, his schedule provided travel time from 9:40 to 10:00 and then a prep period until 10:30, but Michael was often unable to leave Kennedy School until 10:00.

At Jackson School, Michael shared a large, square music room with another early career music teacher, also assigned to two schools. The front half of the classroom was filled with rows of chairs. The back half of the classroom (see Figure 5.9) featured a series of mismatched pianos, piano keyboards, and a round table on which sat four piano keyboards (without access to electricity). Most of the classroom’s bulletin boards were bare.

Figure 5.9 *Piano-Lab Portion of Music Classroom at Jackson School*



Immediately upon arriving at school, Michael put his bowl of oatmeal packets on the teacher’s desk, placed a chart paper tablet on the floor, grabbed a marker, and knelt down to

hurriedly write out a short reading and a question on the paper. When completed, he hung the paper and a roster on the whiteboard at the front of the room. Michael turned to me, “We have to go get the kids here.”

As we walked quickly down the hallway, turned right and walked until we reached the gym, Michel explained, “At this school the students need to be escorted everywhere. I really disagree with that for middle school. Also, I’ve only known these students for about a week so I don’t know all their names. I get a new group of sixth graders each quarter here. Adding this school is kind of like doing my first year all over again.”

When we reached the gym he spoke to the sixth grade students, “Please line up single-file,” then we all walked back down the hallway to the music room. We stopped outside the classroom. “Remember, you are either in the A group or the B group,” Michael began his instructions. “If you don’t remember your group, check the roster on the board. Today, group A should start at the pianos and group B starts at the reading station. I’m going to ask everyone to play “Ode to Joy” for me and I’m going to give you a number from one to ten.”

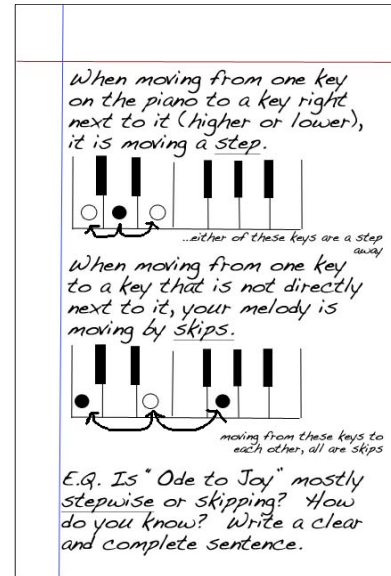
“Mister, is it a grade?”

“Yes, it is part of your practice grade, so if I hear you banging, then you aren’t ready to be checked and you are wasting your time.”

We all entered the room. The A group students rushed to get spots at the “best” keyboards while the B group slowly collected clipboards and half sheets of paper. Michael raised his voice over the noise of nine piano keyboards, “I hear some people banging over there; that is the number one way you are going to get referred in here.” He circulated to each student in the A group and leaned forward to hear/see them play the piece for a grade. To each student he provided individual comments and feedback, encouraging and also corrective as needed.

At the front of the room, the students in group B sat in the chairs or stood near the board to see the reading assignment (see Figure 5.10). Several students clumped together and appeared to work collaboratively on the assignment. Two boys were tossing a ball they brought from the gym. Michael asked them to come over individually to the piano at the front of the room and explain the reading assignment to him. One of the boys had finished, and Michael approved his understanding of the musical concepts step and skip. To the boy, who clearly had not completed the assignment, Michael said, “Please don’t disrespect me by being dishonest to my face,” and he sent the boy back to work on his writing assignment.

Figure 5.10 Reading Station  
Chart Paper Task



He returned his attention to the students at the pianos. A female student was having trouble playing the piece with a steady beat so Michael coached her to play the piece slowly in order to play each rhythm accurately. As she played, he tapped the beat for her and pointed to the music when she got lost. While he was helping this student, two students from group B came up to Michael, clipboards in hand.

“Mister, we don’t understand.”

As Michael turned his attention to the students asking for help, another teacher entered the room and took a student at the pianos out of class before Michael had a chance to hear him play “Ode to Joy.” Michael continued his conversation with the two students from the reading station before moving on to evaluate the playing skills of another piano student. And then it was time for the two groups to switch positions.

Music literacy was a major part of Michael's music teaching practice, particularly at Jackson School.

*Literacy is extremely important. All the research shows that in all of education. I tend to believe that the same thing is true in music education; that music literacy opens up all kinds of doors that before were closed. There are certainly ways to teach music and to appreciate music and to love music and to even connect with music and to have all these different things happen without teaching literacy, but I'm one to believe that literacy opens up a lot of doors that otherwise are closed.*<sup>48</sup>

Michael explained that when he arrived at Jackson this school year, sixth grade students' music literacy had been so neglected by their previous instructor(s) that the students could not identify the musical staff. Slowly, he began building students' knowledge of written musical structures and their ability to decode music's signs and symbols. At his schools, an administrative mandate, designed to improve standardized test scores, required him to integrate reading and writing into his curriculum. Michael used this mandate to increase students' written English language skills as well as musical language skills simultaneously, most prominently in the reading stations he designed for sixth grade general music class at Jackson.

*This idea that early literacy is crucial to students being able to "read to learn" stuck with me, and it made sense to me in the context of music—if you can self-sufficiently "read to learn" the possibilities are endless. . . . Of course, to be "musically literate" there is a lot more than notation—as my students are certainly more literate than me in the music of their native tongue. But that's just it—these kids are already musically literate in so many ways and they just don't know it yet (or, in many cases, they do know, and they're*

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<sup>48</sup>While these ideas appear to have come from any number of sources focused on the importance of literacy (see Greene, 1982; Benedict, 2012), Michael credits these ideas as coming from what he saw during his student teaching placement combined with his own thinking and experiences over time.

*just waiting to be acknowledged). At least, that's how I see it, in my experiences. All you have to do in that regard, is draw it out. (Personal Communication, 24 September 2015)<sup>49</sup>*

At 11:15, sixth grade general music ended and Michael paused at the teacher's desk. The Styrofoam bowl, oatmeal packets and spoon remained, waiting. Instead, Michael took his lunch box out of his backpack and we quickly ate our sandwiches. As he ate, Michael composed a short melodic notation for one of his afternoon classes. While the middle level-focused morning was over, Michael still had four elementary general music classes to prepare and teach at Jackson before the school day ended.

### **Postlude**

In August, just a few weeks before the start of the 2015-2016 school year, Michael and I spoke on the telephone ostensibly to discuss an early draft of his narrative but instead our conversation centered on the end of his school year and his painful decision to leave the district. Not long after my visit, the state board of education voted in favor of a full district takeover by the state government.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the school year, a group of local stakeholders began meeting to discuss recommendations for a “district turnaround plan,” and later the state named an outside manager responsible for the district takeover, replacing the superintendent. After doing some research on the school takeover experience of other teachers, Michael voluntarily decided to leave the district.

When Michael and I discussed the changes that occurred at the end of the school year, he

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<sup>49</sup>This quote is taken from an email communication with Michael on September 24, 2015 in which he was asked to further clarify the locus of his ideas about literacy.

<sup>50</sup>Relevant news articles and district documents were referenced when writing Michael's narrative. In earlier drafts, these articles were referenced with in-text citations. However, upon reading his narrative, the participant in this study expressed concerns about confidentiality given that news articles directly referenced his district. For the purposes of IRB, details are now obscured and the participant has approved this final draft.



described an altered working environment:

*It was very hard to go to work those last two months. It was like all this great positive energy [and] all of the things that were getting better in the district . . . it was really just like, that balloon was popped, and I think . . . no one even knew. Just the morale . . . and everyday coming in rumors, and every day somebody else was like, ‘this happened to me.’ And it was very very difficult. More difficult than I thought.*

As the state takeover details unfolded, teachers in the district discovered that all of the principals would remain in their positions. After spring break, all teachers were observed and evaluated by administrators. Michael personally felt he “got an evaluation that [he] felt was completely unjust.” Michael, along with at least 100 others, decided to leave the district. More than 100 additional teachers were either fired or retired. At Kennedy School, only two of the middle level teachers intended to return for the 2015-2016 school year.

Michael’s new position, in a district serving some of his private piano students, is closer to home and focuses only on middle level general music and chorus. Of his decision to leave and take a new position in another district, Michael says:

*[The] potential of this program [in his new district] hasn’t really been realized in the past few years and they want it to grow, they want kids to be excited about music. They feel like that hasn’t been the case. It was an opportunity; it was a very difficult decision for me. But in the end, it felt like the right decision for now. I haven’t ruled out going back . . . in the future at some point. But for me, in terms of looking at the stability of this [new] job, I think that at least for now, I’d rather be on the outside looking in than having to face some of these problems from in there.*

## Summary

In selecting Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael as my narrative participants, I purposefully chose four teachers with differing experiences, expertise, and pedagogical approaches. When talking with them before visiting, each spoke about aspects of their curriculum that were appealing: Rachel's passion for middle level general music, Beth's focus on individualized student attention and the curriculum she developed for her school, Sarah's exclusive focus on general music in her course load, and Michael's emphasis on using popular music in the classroom. But, when I was visiting each school, additional elements of a teacher's lived experience were surprising and compelling: Rachel's emphasis on relationships and belonging, most evidenced in the Circle of Courage; Beth's eclectic approach to developing musical skills and understanding and the hilarity of teaching sixth graders partner dances; the emphasis on composition and project-based learning in Sarah's classroom; and the administrative challenges faced by Michael. The differences among these narrative participants raise tangled complexities about teaching general music at the middle level.

Looking across these four narratives raises many tensions about the teaching of general music at the middle level. The three research questions are intertwined as teachers interact with and teach young adolescents, discuss their past and present experiences, and share their philosophical grounding.<sup>51</sup> Upon completion of the narratives, each reader can likely list a series of topics for exploration in a discussion section. In presenting these four narratives, I attempt to do as suggested by Clandinin:

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<sup>51</sup>As a reminder, the three research questions that frame this mixed methods study are: RQ1: How and to what extent are middle level music teachers' beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with *This We Believe?*; RQ2: how and to what extent are music teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement?; and RQ3: How do philosophical beliefs and lived experience influence the design of a middle level general music course?

to create research texts that allow audiences to engage in resonant remembering as they lay their experiences alongside the inquiry experiences, to wonder alongside participants and researchers who were part of the inquiry. Final research texts do not have final answers, because narrative inquirers do not come with questions. These texts are intended to engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others. (2013, p. 51)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, narrative research relies on the perspectives of readers as co-interpreters, potentially noting themes relative to personal positioning. For readers versed in music education, tensions related to: 1) creativity and composition, 2) performance and understanding, 3) repertoire selections and the use of popular music in the curriculum, 4) music teacher identity and teacher preparation, and 5) access to musical instruments and the value of music education within the school likely arose. Those familiar with the principles of middle level education likely noticed themes such as: 1) individualized student attention and peer to peer interactions, 2) active learning and diverse forms of assessment, 3) relevant and integrative curriculum, 4) student responsibility and developing citizenship, and 5) student and teacher directed learning. Finally, 1) school closures and state-takeovers, 2) administrative expectations and school-wide philosophy/rules, 3) curriculum development and teacher articulation of goals, and the 4) treatment of young adolescents and school grade level configurations likely came to the forefront for administrators and researchers. All of these tensions and themes, among others, were purposefully constructed as part of these narratives to raise issues relevant to those teaching middle level general music in school communities across the country. In the chapter that follows, I connect the narratives to the survey data in a series of dialectics that raise essential questions about the nature of general music at the middle level.

CHAPTER 6: IN SEARCH OF THE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE MIDDLE LEVEL  
GENERAL MUSIC TEACHERS<sup>52</sup>

In the book *In Search of Music Education*, Jorgensen suggests seven dialectics or pairs of concepts that pose musical and educational dilemmas for music educators: “musical form and context, great and little musical traditions, transmission and transformation, continuity and interaction, making and receiving, understanding and pleasure, and translating theory into practice” (1997, p. 92). While Jorgensen separates out these concepts for the sake of discussion, she sees them as connected and related, all contributing to the work of music education. Like Dewey (1938/1998) who encourages educators to look beyond dichotomies, Jorgensen (1997) illuminates the grey area on the continuum between the paired concepts. In her analysis, she raises music education questions and problems posed by each independent idea as well as those posed by examining the paired concepts. Jorgensen’s analysis does not strive to provide answers for music educators, but rather reveal some of the many problems posed by the concepts that frame the discipline.

In this chapter, I suggest three dialectics that emerged from an examination of the combined survey and narrative data, complexities that are characteristic of the work of teachers in middle level general music. Consistent with Jorgensen’s approach, I discuss paired concepts, dialectics—not dichotomies—which the middle level general music teacher must navigate and for which there are no easy answers. These three dialectics are: 1) making and receiving, 2) children and emerging adults, 3) contested spaces and home places.

In this study, the term dialectic is also used in reference to my use of Greene’s (2007) dialectic paradigmatic stance. As discussed in Chapter 3, this paradigmatic stance attempts to

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<sup>52</sup>I adopt this title from Estelle Jorgensen’s 1997 book *In Search of Music Education* as I also adopt her use of dialectics that challenge the work of middle level general music teachers.

engage multiple perspectives equally and in conversation with one another. In this study, I do so by placing the survey and narrative data in conversation in this mixed methods discussion.

Throughout this chapter, I present the data from the survey and narratives such that it is “not layered or offered separately or sequentially[, but rather] mixed together, interwoven, and interconnected” (Greene, 2007, p. 188). When survey and narrative data support the same idea, or when they present important points of dissonance, the data are woven together in a mixed methods dialectic approach. I use a dialectic paradigmatic stance to discuss the three dialectics that emerged from an analysis across the quantitative and qualitative data collected during this study: two uses of the word dialectic with differing meanings.

Following the presentation of the three dialectics, I discuss how a teacher’s focus on his/her local circumstances is one solution for navigating the boundaries of the dialectics. Then I briefly summarize the findings of the three research questions proposed at the beginning of this study. Limitations and recommendations for future studies conclude this chapter.

### **Dialectic 1: Making and Receiving<sup>53</sup>**

The first dialectic that emerged during data analysis was the curriculum-related dialectic of making (performance) and receiving (perception) of music in middle school general music. Jorgensen (1997) also discusses this dialectic within music education broadly and suggests that this pairing can be traced back to Dewey’s (1934) ideas about artistic creation and aesthetic perception, a music education debate that extends beyond middle level general music (see Elliott, 1995; Elliott & Silverman, 2014; Reimer, 1970; Reimer, 2003; Wiggins, 2001). Questions raised within this dialectic relate to whether middle level general music focuses on the development of performance skills on one or more instruments, including the vocal instrument, or whether it

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<sup>53</sup>In her 1997 book *In Search of Music Education*, Jorgensen calls this dialectic “making and receiving” while in other works, she uses the phrase “making and taking” (2003).

focuses on developing the musical reception skills needed for knowledgeable listening and audience participation.

It is important here to clarify a few terms. I identify performance as the “making” portion of this dialectic, but acknowledge that composition, improvisation, and arranging are also forms of music *making*. However, I discuss *creation* (composition, improvisation, and arranging) of music as separate from music making (performance) because creation and performance were separated as curricular concepts on the survey (see also Abril, 2016). In addition, the participants in this study separated these two aspects of musical learning in their curriculum (some choosing not to include creation) as well as in their discussions with me. Based on this delineation, musical making can occur without musical creation, though the reverse is far less likely. An exclusive focus on making exists at the far end of this dialectical spectrum, but need not exist in isolation. Additionally, the word “performance” is used throughout this section to indicate both the development of musicianship skills within the general music classroom as well as the public performances or concerts common in music education. Beth and Sarah specifically use the word “performance” to indicate *public* performances (concerts) despite the development of musicianship skills occurring within their classroom context. In contrast, Rachel uses “performance” to mean both public performances and the ongoing development of musicianship skills through performance on instruments that occur daily within her general music classroom.

In this dialectic, the development of musicianship skills (performance or making) and development of listening and responding skills (perception or receiving) anchor the two ends of the spectrum that encompasses a variety of musical knowledge and skill. Two facets of this dialectic, 1) the curricular approach and choices of teachers and 2) the impact of a teacher’s

musical expertise and pedagogical decisions, emerged as important features of the making and receiving dialectic.

### **Curricular Approach and Choices**

Curricular decisions or choices within the making and receiving dialectic take two forms: first, the curricular approach or emphasis of a music teacher, and second, the curriculum content implemented in the classroom. The curricular choices made by middle school general music teachers are guided by the given teacher's curricular approach. In middle school general music, this curricular approach is often linked to the teacher's stance on the making and receiving dialectic. Once a teacher has selected a curricular approach within the making and receiving dialectic, he or she then makes curricular choices regarding what courses are called and what musical content is included.

**Curricular Approach.** In general music curriculum designed for young adolescents, one option is to transform the general music classroom into a “non-traditional” ensemble. In some schools, the term general music is not used and music courses are instead defined by the instrument of study, as in Sarah's 8<sup>th</sup> grade guitar course. Over ten percent of survey respondents specified a non-traditional ensemble name for a middle school course they teach; these included: guitar ( $n = 36$ ), piano ( $n = 17$ ), African drums ( $n = 2$ ), steel drums ( $n = 2$ ), percussion ensemble ( $n = 2$ ), Orff ensemble ( $n = 1$ ), mariachi ( $n = 2$ ), and ukulele ( $n = 3$ ). In these renamed courses, the focus is on the study of one specific instrument or musical genre, typically featuring instruments different from those in band, choir, or orchestra.

While Rachel's curricular focus of three non-traditional ensembles emphasizes music making through performance, the course name remains “general music” and the class does not focus exclusively on one instrumental form. At one point during my visit, Rachel and I

discussed her personal understanding of general music. For her, general music was a course in which students experienced more than one form of music making: *“If I did guitar all year, it wouldn’t be general music. I think you have to do a smorgasbord for general music.”* Instead of one ensemble, Rachel’s focus is on performing and building musicianship skills in African drumming, guitar, and handchimes, each of which is led by Rachel, the conductor (albeit without the waving arms). Though these three ensembles allow Rachel’s students to explore three different forms of musical notation, three musical instruments, and the associated performance styles, the curricular emphasis is on the final product, the community-service public performance at the end of each unit.

The emphasis of the three curricular goals stated in Beth’s curriculum document is to provide students with the opportunity to learn a variety of basic musical skills and listen to wide-ranging musical genres. Although not an exact replica, Beth’s general music curriculum aligns with Reimer’s (2003) vision for general music:

A new vision of general music is now called for, one aimed toward enabling all students to (1) gain a grounded understanding, through direct experiences of knowing within and knowing how, supplemented by knowing about and knowing why, of the fullness and diversity of musical satisfactions their culture makes available, and (2) discover if any particular music and role is so personally compelling and fulfilling as to warrant elective study building on and taking further their individual interests and proclivities. (p. 251)

Beth’s ultimate goal is that students eventually develop the musical perception skills of an educated audience, skills in music listening, analysis, and evaluation. Beth draws a firm line between music receiving, the focus of her general music curriculum, and music making, what she considers the purview of music ensembles. She states:



*I see the general music classes as the place for the kids who maybe don't have the interest or don't think they have the natural ability to sing in a choir or to play an instrument. They still need to have exposure; they still need to understand to be intelligent consumers.*

After her 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classes were evaluated on their 12-bar blues improvisations, Beth asked the students what they would like to learn in the next unit. Almost unanimously, students said they wanted to continue playing xylophones or other instruments. When Beth and I discussed this reaction, she mentioned wanting to tell the students to join the after-school ensemble. For Beth, the appetizer of playing an instrument was sufficient, and if it appealed to the students, they should pursue more in-depth study through lessons or the school ensemble. In Beth's approach to general music, the students sample a wide variety of musical knowledge and skills – a worthy goal – and move toward a goal of deeper musical understanding by building skills in musical perception or the receiving of music.

While the curricular approaches of Beth and Rachel help to describe the boundaries of the making and receiving dialectic, the curriculum content of general music is spread across the spectrum. Participants and respondents point to many factors that inform their choices. Over a quarter of the survey respondents reported that musical performance was an essential priority to their curriculum while over thirty percent reported the same for music listening, analysis, and evaluation. These contrasting opinions likely arise from the reality that music is a multidimensional art form that requires both performance and perception (along with other skills and knowledge) for complete understanding.

**Curriculum Content.** The curriculum content selected by a teacher is an application of his or her curricular approach, and it follows that teachers who favor music making focus on

performance while teachers who favor musical reception focus on listening and responding to music. But other factors can also influence the choice of curricular content. The National Standards for Music Education (1994), and more recently the National Core Arts Standards (2014), were cited by over 65% of respondents as being a significant source of guidance for the curricular content.<sup>54</sup> Historical/cultural context, music reading, and composition/improvisation are three aspects of music learning featured in the standards. These three facets of musical knowledge are discussed below as components of musical learning incorporated into curriculum across the making/receiving dialectic.

The historical and cultural context of music, context difficult to separate out of musical learning, enriches the dialectic because it occurs in both making and receiving focused classrooms. The narrative participants demonstrate some of the many rich possibilities for curriculum content within this facet of the dialectic. Rachel's students are expected to learn about the historical and cultural context of each of the three instruments upon which they perform throughout the school year, and Beth's students are expected to understand the early decades of rock and roll through a study of the songs and dances. Michael and Sarah also emphasize historical and cultural context of music depending on the unit of study. Historical and cultural context of music, an essential priority for 24% of survey respondents, is a dimension of music learning that respondents and participants report emphasizing regardless of where a teacher is positioned within the making/receiving dialectic.

Learning to read musical notation, while not necessary for all musical learning, is another aspect of curriculum content present across the making and receiving dialectic. On the survey,

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<sup>54</sup>The national survey included two items about the standards both with the same item stem (see Appendix C). The first item asked about the influence of the 1994/2014 National Standards on a teacher's curricular choices and the second about the influence of state and/or district curriculum standards/guidelines/benchmarks on curricular choices. The state/district standards were ranked higher than the national standards (see Chapter 4).

over one sixth of the respondent population reported that Western music theory (the survey did not address other forms of musical notation) was an essential priority in their middle level general music curriculum. Some form of musical notation, guitar tablature or standard Western musical notation, was evident in all four narrative participant teachers' classrooms, indicating that reading musical notation is an important musical skill across the making and receiving dialectic. Michael's music theory-focused reading stations at Jackson School are the most overt example of developing skills in music reading, what he calls music literacy. Beth also works to teach students the basics of Western musical notation, as evident in her fifth grade lesson on meters. Application of these theory skills sometimes occurred immediately, as in Michael's piano keyboard curriculum, or sometimes occurred in a later lesson, depending on how the teacher sequenced the curriculum. In addition, musical notation is not limited to Western music theory, as evident in the guitar tablature read by Rachel's and Sarah's students. The ability to read the signs and symbols of the musical alphabet, music literacy, is yet another possible skill taught across the making/receiving dialectic.

Finally, musical composition and improvisation connects all of the aforementioned music learning aspects: making, receiving, reading, and cultural context. Over twenty percent of survey respondents ranked music creation as an essential priority to their middle level general music curriculum, while fifteen percent ranked music creation with technology the same. The blues lyrics and garage band compositions featured in Sarah's narrative are just two examples of composition projects that occur throughout Sarah's curriculum and build upon students' developing skills in performance, understanding, cultural relevance, and notation. Because of her project-based pedagogical approach to general music, Sarah is prepared to allow ample time in her curriculum for composition creation, revision, and presentation. Students' final products

demonstrate an ability to follow project directions, but also to develop skills in both music making and receiving. A composition-focused curriculum in middle school general music draws upon all aspects of the making and receiving dialectic.

The curricular choices made by a middle school general music teacher are not straightforward. The decision to integrate a particular facet of the making/receiving spectrum or to emphasize making or receiving is a complex choice. The facets discussed here are just some of the curricular choices available to a music teacher, guided by his or her curricular approach which situates the teacher within the making and receiving dialectic. All teachers must adjudicate, based on their personal experience and their students, what is included and what is emphasized in their own curriculum.

### **Teacher Musical Expertise and Pedagogical Decisions**

A teacher's musical expertise and pedagogical decision-making are also facets of the making/receiving dialectic in this study. A music teacher's musical expertise, pedagogical preparation, and understanding of curriculum development all impact both the curricular choices made and the pedagogical approaches utilized. Data in this study revealed that a teacher's musical expertise influenced his or her curricular decisions, particularly with regard to the incorporation of performance into the middle school general music curriculum. In addition, pedagogical choices of teachers encourage or discourage students to actively engage in musical learning, regardless of the curricular focus on the making and receiving dialectic.

**Musical Expertise.** Again, Rachel and Beth serve as examples to bound the making and receiving dialectic. Rachel's musicianship, both learned in school and self-taught, is evident throughout her work in general music. She specialized in vocal music in college and has worked throughout her career to master the musical styles she teaches in general music. She considers

herself a choral director and values the development of performance skills in all students. Her musical expertise is reflected in her curricular prioritization of musical performance in general music as well as her own performance on voice and guitar throughout her general music class. This identity is also reflected in the way in which she leads her class or in her pedagogical approach because, as Gerrity observes, “successful conductors, more comfortable in front of performing groups, often direct their general music classes as if they were choral or instrumental ensembles” (2009, p. 41). Rachel’s primary pedagogical approach is whole class music making, which she leads like a conductor. In contrast, Beth considers herself a general music teacher and was educated as a music therapist, a profession that emphasizes the use of music to improve the well being of individuals. This philosophical approach is evident in the way Beth utilizes varied pedagogies as she works to reach each individual student in her classroom. Beth relies primarily on musical recordings in her curriculum. Whether the use of recordings is done for practical or musical reasons is unknown; however, her own skills on her primary instrument (piano) rarely surface in the classroom. Instead of performing herself, Beth’s attention as a teacher is focused on meeting individual student needs and individualizing her curriculum and pedagogy. As responding to or receiving music is Beth’s primary goal for her general music curriculum, the use of recorded musical excerpts allows her to share a plethora of musical genres with students, replay excerpts for struggling students, and adjust volume for those with sensitivity to sound, worthy and appropriate goals given the curriculum she has designed.

The survey results regarding the importance of general music curricular content to teachers who self-identify as general music teachers or ensemble directors add a layer of complexity to the narrative data. Eighteen percent of survey respondents identified as general music teachers while over seventy percent identified as band, choir, or orchestra teachers.

Table 6.1

*Independent group t-tests for Curricular Priorities and Identity as a General Music Teacher*

Item	See Self as General Music Teacher	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Pr( T > t )	Pr(T<t)
Musical Performance <sup>a</sup>	No	558	3.39	1.27	3.28	3.49	-4.0131	410.59	0.0001	0.0000
	Yes	202	3.76	1.09	3.61	3.91				
Music Listening, Analysis, and Evaluation	No	561	3.89	0.96	3.82	3.97	-0.4707	763	0.6380	0.3190
	Yes	204	3.93	0.93	3.80	4.06				
Music Creation	No	558	3.38	1.18	3.28	3.48	-1.3850	760	0.1664	0.0832
	Yes	204	3.51	1.16	3.36	3.67				
Historical and Cultural Context	No	559	3.78	1.08	3.49	3.67	-1.6732	762	0.0947	0.0474
	Yes	205	3.73	1.08	3.58	3.88				
Western Music Theory <sup>a</sup>	No	552	3.14	1.24	3.04	3.25	-3.3552	421.513	0.0009	0.0004
	Yes	204	3.45	1.06	3.30	3.60				

<sup>a</sup>Unequal variances, Satterthwaite's approximation calculated

Independent group t-tests of survey respondents identifying as general music teachers, as compared with those who do not identify as general music teachers, were conducted. These tests revealed two statistically significant differences on the five aspects of curriculum discussed above: performance, listening/analysis/evaluation, creation, historical/cultural context, and music notation (see Table 6.1). Survey results indicated that those who identify as general music teachers ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ) prioritize musical performance<sup>55</sup> at a higher average response rate

<sup>55</sup>The survey question stem asked: "In the middle school general music course(s) you have taught, what was the priority of the following content areas in your curriculum . . . The item for performance read "Musical performance (piano, guitar, singing, etc.)." The survey did not specify the definition of "performance." Respondents may have interpreted this question as indicating the development of musicianship through in-class performance that occurs within the general music classroom and/or performances presented in a public setting. Clarity in this item would provide stronger analysis.

than those who do not identify as general music teachers ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). In addition, those who identify as general music teachers ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) prioritize Western music theory more highly than do those who do not identify as general music teachers ( $M = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ). On both performance  $t(410.59) = -4.0131$ ,  $p = 0.0001$  and Western music theory  $t(421.513) = -3.3552$ ,  $p = 0.0009$ , those self-identifying as general music teachers were statistically different from those who did not self-identify as general music teachers.<sup>56</sup> The mean intervals for both of these findings do not overlap at the 95% confidence interval, thus indicating an even stronger statistical relationship between the prioritization of musical performance or Western music theory and teachers who see themselves as general music teachers. While more data is needed, these findings seem to indicate that music teachers self-identifying as general music teachers place a higher priority on learning Western music theory and on musical performance in middle school general music than do those who identify as ensemble directors. Perhaps these findings suggest a philosophical difference in the conceptualization of general music or belief in the capabilities of the enrolled middle school students between the two groups of teachers, a potential topic of investigation for future studies.

Although many music teachers, like Rachel, identify as an ensemble director, as a “choral,” “band,” or “orchestral” person, or like Beth, as a “general music” person, there are music educators who identify as something beyond their course content or musical expertise. Sarah and Michael are two such teachers representing ten percent of survey respondents who selected the “other” option to express how they see themselves as teachers (see Chapter 4 for more detail). How Sarah sees herself as a music teacher is shaped by the professional development she has sought in order to succeed in the many jobs, in all grade levels and musical content, that she has held throughout her career. Though she originally identified as a band

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<sup>56</sup>Unequal variances, Satterthwaite’s approximation calculated

director, her current project-based curriculum focus is greatly influenced by her inservice training in Orff and Kodaly pedagogies. While Sarah identified on the survey as a general music and guitar teacher, her ever-changing musical identity is potentially more similar to those survey respondents who added “music teacher” or “music educator” when asked to specify how they saw themselves. As discussed in his narrative, Michael, a pianist and vocalist, sees himself primarily as a creative musician. His identity as a creative musician is often on display in his classroom through the activities he designs or the musical arrangements he creates for his classes. It is beyond the scope of the survey to know how many respondents might have selected the “creative musician” option had it been available on the survey. Further research is needed to investigate those music educators who do not associate themselves with their musical expertise but rather see themselves as “music teachers” or “creative musicians” and the influence this may have on curricular decisions made regarding middle school general music.

**Student Engagement and Relationship.** All four narrative participants have created learning environments where nearly all, if not all, students are actively engaged<sup>57</sup> in the curricular content—an important component of middle level pedagogy. Sarah and Michael typically give middle level students more autonomy during classroom activities than do Rachel and Beth, both of whom used more direct instructional techniques during my visit. Yet, even in the most teacher-directed instruction, as in Beth’s fifth grade time signature lesson, students were actively raising hands, asking questions, and engaged with the teacher in the learning task.

Results from the TWB2 composite variable support this observation and reveal that over 95% of survey respondents engage students in techniques that are active, engaging, and purposeful sometimes, often, or always. Collaborating with students, allowing student choice,

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<sup>57</sup>Student engagement here is based purely on classroom observation. No students were interviewed as part of this study.



providing individualized learning activities, and engaging students personally in musical learning are just some of the pedagogical techniques that comprise the TWB2 composite variable (see Table 6.2). On only one of the seven items that comprise TWB2 is there a statistically significant difference, at the 95% confidence interval, between those who self-identify as general music teachers and those who do not. Those self-identifying as general music teachers ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) are more likely to collaborate with students when developing learning activities

Table 6.2

*Independent group t-tests for TWB2 items and Identity as a General Music Teacher*

Item	See Self as General Music Teacher	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Pr( T > t )	Pr(T<t)
	No				Yes					
Using technologies for musical creation	No	555	2.98	1.32	2.87	3.09	-0.0285	754	0.9772	0.4886
	Yes	201	2.99	1.29	2.81	3.17				
Allowing for student choice	No	556	3.78	0.99	3.70	3.87	-1.8504	757	0.0647	0.0323
	Yes	203	3.93	0.90	3.81	4.06				
Collaborating with students when developing activities	No	519	3.06	1.04	2.97	3.15	-2.4138	714	0.0160	0.0080
	Yes	197	3.26	1.01	3.12	3.41				
Individualized learning activities	No	522	3.16	0.99	3.07	3.24	0.4079	719	0.6835	0.6583
	Yes	199	3.13	0.95	2.99	3.26				
Student directed music making	No	523	3.14	1.03	3.05	3.23	-0.4535	720	0.6503	0.3252
	Yes	199	3.18	0.97	3.04	3.31				
Engaging students personally in musical learning	No	524	3.74	0.84	3.67	3.81	0.5600	718	0.5756	0.7122
	Yes	187	3.70	0.86	3.58	3.82				
Empowering students to make decisions about their music education	No	557	3.51	1.09	3.42	3.60	-1.9033	757	0.0574	0.0287
	Yes	202	3.68	1.00	3.54	3.82				

than those who do not ( $M = 306$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ );  $t(714) = -2.41$ ,  $p = 0.02$ . According to *This We Believe*, “since young adolescents learn best through engagement and interaction, learning strategies should involve students in dialogue with teachers and with one another about what to study and how best to study topics selected” (NMSA, 2010, p. 23). Survey results indicate that those who self-identify as general music teachers engage students in this type of student-directed learning more than respondents who identify as ensemble directors, suggesting a potential professional development need in music education. The lack of other statistically significant findings suggests that middle school general music teachers regardless of musical expertise similarly prioritize an active learning environment.

The commonality shared by the narrative participants is not their curricular emphasis or teacher identity on the making and receiving dialectic, but rather their pedagogical emphasis on student relationships, an essential component of the middle level concept. Throughout the middle level literature (Brown, 2013; Davies, 1995; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992; Vinz, 2010), the term “relationship” is used to denote a teacher whose interactions are described by students as fair, respectful, trustworthy, challenging, funny, and safe (George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992). I acknowledge that a teacher with eight class periods each filled with twenty-five students cannot possibly develop a deep and meaningful relationship with every student. The idea of relationship here might be better termed an “authentic interaction” between a teacher and his or her students. In essence, a middle level teacher who works at establishing relationships with students through authentic interactions such as laughing, listening, flexibility, asking about students’ lives, challenging students intellectually, and setting clear boundaries is a teacher who cares about students as individuals (Brown, 2013; Brown & Knowles, 2007; Noddings, 1992; Stipek, 2006). According to Brown (2013), “demonstrations of

care enhance student/teacher relationships in significant ways thus improving learning for students” (p. 22), an idea confirmed by Stipek’s research with adolescents who “report that they work harder for teachers who treat them as individuals and express interest in their personal lives outside school” (2006, p. 46).

Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael, in keeping with their individual personalities, all strive to develop relationships with their students, relationships that serve to strengthen student engagement during instruction. Whether this connection and relationship comes through spending some of their scarce free time with a student, beginning class by asking students about a recent sporting event, caring about students’ individual learning needs, or laughing with students over their composed lyrics, each narrative participant connected with students in general music in his or her own way. This was perhaps the most striking thing about my visits to these classrooms: while these four teachers are remarkably different from one another, they all demonstrate, through their actions in the classroom and student responses to lesson activities, positive and effective teacher-to-student relationships. It is beyond the scope of the survey to determine whether respondents also develop positive relationships with their students. However, it is clear from observing the four narrative participants that this is an essential component of their pedagogical work.

The making and receiving dialectic raises many questions for consideration by middle school general music teachers. While a teacher may make curricular choices based on his or her curricular approach, which falls on a spectrum between musical perception or musical performance, teachers must also make decisions about their interactions with students. Evidence from the narrative portion of the current study suggests that middle level teachers who establish the kinds of relationships described above with young adolescents are teachers for whom active

student engagement in the learning environment is easily achieved, regardless of the specific curricular content implemented. Further research is needed to know whether this finding applies to a wider population of middle level general music teachers.

### **Dialectic 2: Children and Emerging Adults**

Students between the ages of ten and fifteen are developing physically, intellectually, psychologically, socially, and morally at a rapid and inconsistent rate (NMSA, 2010; Roney, 2005). Due to the many changes they experience during maturation, young adolescents appear to adults to vacillate between child-like and adult-like behavior, challenging their teachers and schools to provide a developmentally appropriate education. This dialectic focuses on the tensions that arise for general music teachers when working with young adolescents, students who are no longer children but not yet full adolescents.

Over 80% of survey respondents reported moderate or extreme confidence on all nine characteristics of young adolescent development investigated (see Table 6.3). However, a teacher's confidence in young adolescent development is often challenged by a number of school and job related factors. In this study, two tensions impacting the teaching of middle level general

Table 6.3

#### *Reported Confidence on Dimensions of Young Adolescent Development*

Young Adolescent Development Characteristic	Not at all Confident	Somewhat Confident	Moderately Confident	Extremely Confident
Physical transitions of puberty ( $n = 691$ )	0.29	7.24	46.74	45.73
Cognitive transitions of puberty ( $n = 691$ )	0.87	13.46	50.65	35.02
Development of abstract thinking ( $n = 691$ )	1.59	17.80	50.80	29.81
Search for competence ( $n = 688$ )	1.16	12.94	51.74	34.16
Development of personal identity ( $n = 689$ )	1.02	11.76	46.73	40.49
Desire for personal autonomy ( $n = 688$ )	1.02	10.17	44.48	44.33
Desire for belonging & peer acceptance ( $n = 688$ )	0.15	2.33	31.98	65.55
Need for support & desire for independence ( $n = 686$ )	0.44	3.79	38.78	57.00
Uneven & unequal development ( $n = 689$ )	0.87	7.98	39.77	51.38

music arose across the data: the school community's ecology or philosophical focus on young adolescent development and the teacher's grade-level responsibilities.

### **Developmentally Appropriate Education: The School Ecology<sup>58</sup>**

What grade level configuration is right for young adolescents? As discussed in the review of literature, the grade level configuration of a school building is not as important as its philosophical adherence to the principles of middle level philosophy. Both The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform and The Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE) prioritize developmentally appropriate school environments over the grade configuration of a school. According to the National Forum, "what is most important for the education of young adolescent learners is what takes place inside each middle-grades school, not grade configuration per se" (National Forum, 2008, p. 1).

Several studies reviewed previously (Carolan & Chesky, 2012; Eccles, Lord, & Midgley, 1991; Styron & Nyman, 2008) discussed the important role of the school community in promoting positive student achievement, particularly when students felt personal attachment to their school. In discussing adolescent attachment or connectedness to school, Waters, Cross, and Runions (2009) proposed a four-phase theoretical model focused on how positive student health is promoted through what they call "school ecology." According to these scholars, a school ecology consists of the school's organizational structures (school and class size, departmentalization, grade levels, etc.), the manner in which the school functions (for example, democratically, developmentally appropriate, with high expectations and clear behavioral norms), the built environment or the building facilities themselves (clean, well-maintained,

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<sup>58</sup>It is important to note that the comparisons between these four schools are made entirely based on the developmentally appropriate structures and pedagogies observed during my visit or shared with me by the participants. Other factors in the school community such as socio-economic status, private or public, and state or administrative pressures may be confounding factors in the administration's prioritization of developmentally appropriate education for young adolescents. These factors were not considered in my analysis in this section.

appropriately sized, etc.), and the nature of relationships between and among students, staff, and parents (Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009). In their four phase model, the school ecology determines the “extent to which students feel autonomous yet supported, competent in all they attempt, and related to adults and peers,” feelings that are supported by and increased through a “responsive and developmentally appropriate school ecology” one that is appropriate to individual student needs (2009, p. 521). According to the authors, “when a school’s social ecology is tailored to create developmentally appropriate structures and interaction opportunities to help satisfy the changing adolescent developmental needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, students’ feelings of connectedness to school are enhanced” and thus young adolescents are healthier and more academically successful (Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009, p. 521).

The way in which the school ecology, whether K-8, 6-8, or 7-12 addresses the developmental needs of young adolescents impacts the extent to which a middle level general music teacher can make his or her classroom an ideal space for the education of young adolescents. Hough (1995) calls a K-8 school that is *recultured* to explicitly address the needs of students between the ages of 10-15 an *elemiddle* (George, 2005; Hough, 1995; Hough, 2005). It is the philosophical approach to the education of young adolescents, evidenced throughout the entire school ecology (not just in the music room) that makes a K-8 school an *elemiddle*. The same is true for a 7-12 grade configuration; a guiding philosophy that distinguishes education for middle level students as different from that of the older students enables teachers to provide the most developmentally appropriate learning environments for young adolescents. Teachers who desire to provide developmentally appropriate education for young adolescents are either supported in their efforts by the developmentally appropriate school ecology already in place at

the school or they work against the ecology in place at their schools in order to provide the education they believe is best.

Results presented in the survey chapter indicated that a teacher's experiences in his or her classroom and school community (teaching experience, conversations with colleagues, and musical engagement) have the greatest impact on the curricular and pedagogical choices made in the general music classroom. This finding suggests, though cannot prove, that the school ecology (its grade level configuration as well as the beliefs of the community) may influence the developmentally appropriate education provided by middle school general music teachers. Further research is needed to fully understand the connection between the influence of school ecology on the curricular and pedagogical decisions made by teachers. In addition, future research should collect data on school philosophy, school climate, and focus on young adolescents as a unique student population.

Adams Junior High is the only school I visited entirely devoted to the education of young adolescents. The district even chooses to separate 6<sup>th</sup> grade into a self-contained community in order to ease the students' transition from multiple elementary schools into a single middle school community. Thus Sarah's school focuses exclusively on grades 7 and 8. Based on her experience teaching in schools in a variety of grade configurations, Sarah says:

*I think that the just middle school building is really a good way to go because that gives [middle schoolers] not only the opportunity to mature into themselves and make mistakes and all those sorts of things, but then it gives the eighth graders that chance for leadership and to step-up, and hopefully they do step-up.*

While the language of the middle level concept was not explicitly used at Adams Junior High, at least during my visit, it is clear that efforts are made to create a school ecology uniquely suited to

young adolescents: daily advisories, exploratory electives, music and art requirements, eighth grade leadership responsibilities, and hands-on activities are just some of the tools used by Adams Junior High in alignment with the middle level concept (Alexander et al., 1968; Eichhorn, 1966; Jackson & Davis, 2000; George, Stevenson, Thomason, & Beane, 1992; McEwin & Greene, 2011).

In many ways, St. Mary's Catholic School is an exemplar of how a school ecology for young adolescents can be distinguished from a school ecology for young children even when the students are educated within the same building. St. Mary's teachers and administrators make conscious efforts to allow young adolescents more freedom while simultaneously expecting more leadership and responsibility, thus allowing the students to test out their emerging adult-like abilities. For example, all eighth grade students are given a kindergarten buddy who they support throughout the year. At a disorganized Morning Prayer during my visit (because of a science display in the Student Center), a kindergartener could not find his class so he sought out his eighth grade buddy and stood holding her hand throughout the assembly. In addition, students in grades 5-8 are members of after-school ensembles that prepare and lead music at the Catholic masses that occur throughout the year. Students can also audition to become worship cantors giving them even more responsibility over the progress of the worship service attended by all 400 enrolled students and the faculty. The planners and binders utilized in Beth's classroom are responsibility-teaching tools emphasized throughout the school community. These and many other efforts by teachers and administrators suggest that St. Mary's is attempting to function as an elemiddle. While much of this effort emphasizes a high school preparatory environment, focusing on what is to come rather than addressing the immediate needs of young adolescents, the school makes a concerted effort to set young adolescents apart



from those in K-4. Beth is able to differentiate middle school general music from elementary, as well as focus on the learning needs of young adolescents during general music, because of structures her school puts in place to distinguish students in grades 5-8 from those in K-4. The school ecology of St. Mary's Catholic Elementary enables Beth to more easily navigate the tensions of this dialectic and provide a developmentally appropriate learning environment for her middle level students.

In contrast, at Michael's two K-8 schools the school ecology did not focus on developmentally appropriate learning for young adolescents. As a consequence, the developmentally appropriate efforts that did occur existed only within the confines of individual teachers' classrooms, leaving teachers to negotiate the tensions of this dialectic without support. As a teacher, Michael made curricular and pedagogical choices that distinguish his middle level general music from his elementary general music, yet administrative issues continually impacted his job. Many of these administrative decisions, such as expelling students on the day of the music field trip so that they cannot attend,<sup>59</sup> are not done in the best interest of the developmental needs of young adolescents. In fact, I would suggest that actions such as these revert to the issues identified in the original 1989 Carnegie Report which stated that many young adolescents were in danger of dropping out of school because their school did not meet their developmental needs. Based on my observations of the schools in this study, the school weakest in providing a school ecology appropriate for young adolescents is Jackson School, where sixth graders must walk to and from classes in straight lines, escorted by teachers, suggesting that students' developing autonomy and independence are not valued. These problems extend beyond Michael's two schools to the district level where, according to Michael, the decision to combine

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<sup>59</sup>This was how Michael perceived the expulsion of students on the day of the field trip. Michael and two other teachers, Kennedy School's other music teacher and the physical education teacher, who were chaperones on the trip, discussed this in an informal conversation on the way to the field trip location.

K-5 with 6-8 was done because of enrollment changes and without complete consideration of the physical structures needed to facilitate young adolescent learning. Baltimore, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, and Oklahoma City are just some of the school districts that have chosen the K-8 pathway since the late 1990s for reasons such as student population decline, urban neighborhood changes, funding availability, and reactions to educational research reporting higher test scores of students attending K-8 schools (Abella, 2005; George, 2005; Gewertz, 2004), reasons similar to those of Michael's district. At both Kennedy School and Jackson School, some infrastructure issues remain a part of these young adolescents' daily educational experience, demonstrating to students, if only subconsciously, that the school building they attend is not designed for them. Though Michael navigated this dialectic relatively well, his school ecology worked against him rather than supporting him in his attempt to provide developmentally appropriate learning for his middle level students.

Washington Junior/Senior High, Rachel's school, presents an alternative to the K-8 approach because instead, the district places all students in grades 7-12 within the same school community. This grade configuration is more common in rural areas, but also exists in some urban areas. For example, in the 1990s Cincinnati Public Schools moved to a K-8 model, but in 2011 changed to a 7-12 model (J. Brown, 2011). A limited amount of research is conducted on the success of young adolescents in 7-12 schools, primarily success measured by standardized test scores (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Franklin & Glascock, 1998; Stern, 1994). Within the Washington Jr./Sr. High ecology, students at Rachel's school are more likely to be treated like full adolescents, a maturity for which they may be unprepared as they continue to vacillate on the child/emerging adult dialectic. Rachel struggles with how little attention she sees focused on the

needs of young adolescents within her school ecology (particularly by administrators and other faculty):

*I wish that there was a little more catering to the junior high needs, the adolescent needs because they're really thrown into this high school setting. . . . I don't know if it's even possible here because of the shared spaces. You know this happens once in a while, there will be a seventh grader going out with [dating] a tenth grader and it's really inappropriate. I know that happens, but I just don't remember my middle school experience being that way. [When I was] teaching [at my previous school a] 5, 6, 7, 8 building, it wasn't that way; it was almost like safer, I want to say. I don't know if that can happen here just because of the way the building is physically set-up. . . . There isn't a middle school concept here.*

Three examples from my work with Rachel demonstrate that attention to the developmental needs of young adolescents is limited within the Washington Junior/Senior High ecology, a school that operates like a large high school. First, all seventh grade students are assigned to an interdisciplinary “team” a group of teachers in math, science, social studies, and language arts who teach the same group of students and have collective planning time, a practice called for by many scholars and practitioners in middle level education (Boyer & Bishop, 2004; Cook, Faulkner & Kinne, 2009; Faulkner, 2003; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999; Goodman, 2006; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Kiefer & Ellerbrock, 2012; McEwin & Greene, 2011). However, as an arts teacher, Rachel teaches students assigned to all seventh grade “teams” and does not share a common planning time with the members of the teams (see also Burnaford, 1993; Hamann, 2007; Moore, 1994; Snyder, 2001), so she must make extra effort to communicate and collaborate with these teachers. Second, Rachel told me the school does not schedule faculty

meetings just for the middle school teachers, preventing any sustained teacher discussion about the needs of young adolescents. The faculty meeting I attended during my visit was a meeting for 7-12 teachers and featured discussion of upcoming “college week” activities designed to encourage students to apply to college. While middle school students should be encouraged to think about their future, considering college applications is not developmentally appropriate for or relevant to young adolescents. Third, Rachel told me a story about a 7<sup>th</sup> grader who, on the first day of school, was inside her classroom curled up in a ball refusing to move because of how overwhelming the 7-12 school was to the student. Though Washington Junior/Senior High implements some strategies consistent with the middle level concept, like interdisciplinary teams, the school ecology is focused on the entire student population rather than on the middle school and the high school as entities needing separation or differentiation. This lack of emphasis within the school ecology on the needs of young adolescents challenges teachers like Rachel who strive to provide developmentally appropriate learning despite support from school-wide efforts.

Though Michael and Rachel focus on the developmental needs of their students and implement pedagogical strategies designed to serve young adolescents, they, unlike Beth and Sarah, must work against their particular school ecology that does not entirely support their efforts. In her study of the first year of K-8 implementation at a school, Ruppert (2010) agreed that a K-8 school can work “if the activities that are planned include middle school practices” and that the “curriculum and strategies must be comprehensive and intentional, designed to help teachers, administrators, and students succeed” (p. 284). School communities attended by young adolescents have a responsibility to facilitate and support a teacher’s ability to provide the best developmentally appropriate education possible. Ruppert suggests that “the key to success lies

in leadership” of the school community (2010, p. 284). School ecology relies on the decisions made and upheld by administrators. As individual teachers, Sarah, Beth, Michael, and Rachel all attempt to implement curriculum and pedagogy in general music designed for young adolescents. However, the school’s implementation of middle level practices that support the developmental needs of young adolescents assists middle level general music teachers in providing a musical learning environment appropriate for young adolescents.

### **Developmentally Appropriate Education: Teacher Responsibilities**

Sarah is the only participant working at a school devoted to middle level students; her school serves students in grades 7-8. Narrative participants Beth and Michael teach at K-8 schools. Rachel teaches at a 7-12 school, though she almost exclusively teaches grades 7-8. Although no narrative participant in this study taught in separate middle and high school or elementary and middle school buildings, these music teaching assignments are also possible. According to Parsad and Spiegelman (2012), during the 2009-2010 school year, 54% of full-time elementary and 46% of full-time secondary music specialists taught at more than one school.

Sarah, who previously taught in K-8 and 7-12 schools, and now teaches in a 7-8 school summarizes one of the many challenges these various school configurations can present to teachers, particularly general music teachers.

*From [my] standpoint . . . as a teacher doing that K-8 [teaching] versus switching to K-5 or now only focusing on seventh and eighth grade, you have to think a completely different way, and if your schedule isn’t set up the right way (and I was pretty fortunate most of the time) but if your schedule is like eighth grade, Kindergarten, second grade, third grade it’s really difficult to adjust your expectations up and down really fast from group to group. If you have a descending schedule, which most of the time I did, like*

*eighth, seventh, sixth and then sometimes I had K-2-3 after, at least you're more accurate in what you expect and don't expect from the kids. I've also worked in 7-12 buildings where I think that works almost as well as the middle school, only the eighth graders don't get as much of an opportunity for leadership and I think that helps them become more mature and more responsible and I think that's important.*

Sarah highlights one of the major pedagogical (and sometimes curricular) challenges faced by both Michael and Beth: the transition between teaching young children and young adolescents as a K-8 general music teacher.

Each day Michael and Beth were required to switch between “elementary teaching mode” and “middle level teaching mode.” For Michael, this switch occurred after lunch, a potentially easier switch because of the natural break in the day. Beth’s schedule was arranged in such a way that the number of times she switched back and forth between early elementary and middle level students varied based on the day of the week. Typically she only made one switch, but on Wednesdays she taught eighth grade, had a planning period, then taught kindergarten followed immediately by seventh grade. On my first day, I saw a dramatic shift in her body language when fifth graders arrived after four sections of K-3. Beth described this switch in her body language as a release because “*the physical activity of the day is done*” and a necessary switch because the older students need a different “*persona*” from her. According to Beth, one of the reasons she was highly aware of student developmental and individual needs was drawn from her education as a music therapist (though other music teachers may be equally aware of individual student needs for different reasons). Beth’s change in persona, based on her understanding of the needs of middle level learners as compared with early elementary students, seemed as natural to her as any other aspect of her work. The transition between communicating with K-4 students

followed by communicating with students in grades 5-8, sometimes returning again to communicate with younger students, added a layer of complexity to the teaching of general music unique to a K-8 learning environment. While both Michael and Beth made the switch relatively flawlessly, the need for the shift between ages made their teaching lives more difficult (and sometimes exhausting to watch).

Data from the survey reveals that many middle school general music teachers are expected to make this regular transition between young adolescents and either younger or older students. Of the 475 survey respondents who reported teaching middle school general music during the 2014-2015 school year, 191 (40%) also taught elementary general music like Beth and Michael. An additional 44 respondents (9.26%) taught high school general music in combination with middle school general music. In addition, 32% of those with middle school general music responsibilities also taught a high school ensemble (band, choir, or orchestra) while 34% taught an elementary ensemble. No data was collected regarding the challenges faced by survey participants who taught two grade levels, nor was any data collected regarding whether these teachers with multi-grade level responsibilities were assigned to one or multiple schools. Future research would benefit from collection of this type of school-level and teacher-level data specifically focused on middle level music specialists.

In follow-up conversations with Michael, he shared that one of the major benefits of his move to a middle level only position (for 2015-2016) is that he is able to focus entirely on middle level students:

*In terms of lesson planning where it's like, instead of nine grades to work with [at Kennedy School and Jackson School], now I'm looking at having to plan for two*

*[grades], that's a big change. The schedule, I see every class in the school once a week. . . . Big changes in terms of, like, how I'm going to be operating.*

For Michael, the absence of this additional burden alleviates much of the stress placed on him when teaching K-8. Though, of necessity, many general music teachers must teach across grade level groupings, those able to focus exclusively on the needs of young adolescents can more easily negotiate the child/emerging adult dialectic so prominent in middle level education.

The child/emerging adult dialectic raises a number of tensions for educators who work with young adolescents; however, many of these tensions are beyond the control of the individual teacher. While a music teacher can choose to facilitate the vacillating developmental needs of young adolescents within his or her general music classroom, the school administration can support or hinder this work. Whether the teacher is required to teach across a wide span of grades or whether the school ecology is developmentally appropriate for young adolescents makes the teacher's job easier or harder. Developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy is certainly a major responsibility of any educator; however, responsibility also lies with the overall school ecology promoted within the school, a teacher's professional "home," which can enable or inhibit a teacher's ability to do so.

### **Dialectic 3: Contested Spaces and Home Places**

The third dialectic that emerged during this study was the spectrum of contested spaces and home places. In everyday language, the words "space" and "place" are often used interchangeably, yet in philosophy they hold very different meanings. Almost any location can be a space, but it is through lived experience that a location becomes a place.

A fundamental premise of philosophy of place, then is that place is the nexus – a synthesis – of time, space, and *experience*. Place is lived. . . . Further, place is a matter of



subjectivity, something closely linked to experience and interpretation. . . . Experience, action, interaction, point of view, memory, and imagination matter to place and sense of place. (Stauffer, 2012, pp. 436-437, emphasis in original)

In this dialectic, I extend the philosophical concepts of space and place by adding adjectives. Contested spaces and home places demarcate the spectrum of this dialectic in middle level general music. A middle level general music class that is a contested space is a class perceived by the teacher as challenged, either internally or externally. Contested spaces are the general music classrooms where general music happens without connection to or support from the school community or potentially where general music occurs under duress. A home place middle level general music class is one in which the teacher perceives he/she has established, for him/herself and for the students, a lived place of comfort and value. The establishment of a home place occurs over time, through interactions in the school community, and is part of the lived experience of a teacher.

For a number of reasons, some of which will be discussed below, middle level general music classes, and the teachers who teach them, exist on this dialectical continuum between contested spaces and home places. This dialectic focuses primarily on the role of the general music teacher and the general music class within the school community; however, this dialectic also exists within both music education and middle level education broadly. A music teacher can perceive his/her middle school general music class as moving from a contested space to a home place, but this perception can easily change again with time, depending on the circumstances (Stauffer, 2009; 2012). Unlike the other dialectics, this dialectic does not rely on the curricular or pedagogical decisions of teachers and schools; rather, it relies on time and the actions of the teacher within the wider school community as well as the wider work of music educators within

and beyond the discipline.

### **Within The School Community**

The current attitude toward general music within each school featured in the narratives is directly related to whether Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael have established a “home” within the school. Rachel and Beth no longer felt their curriculum was contested, a direct link to their longevity at their school as well as the comfort and feeling of home each conveyed within their classroom. On the other hand, general music, in big and small ways, is still contested at Michael and Sarah’s schools. Michael and Sarah’s lack of connection to their school community is only one of many reasons why their general music classes are contested spaces.

**General Music Contested Spaces.** At Adams Junior High, Sarah experienced a devaluing of general music by administration and the students, but she was beginning to establish home places in her classroom and within the music department. Sarah’s daily negotiation of this dialectic was complex as she experienced contested spaces and the beginning of home places simultaneously.

Sarah did not yet fully belong to her school community, a factor in her experience of general music as administratively contested. In the narrative, Sarah felt unheard by her administration when she attempted to explain her project-based curriculum. The administrative mandate of daily changing her Purpose and Task, while a potentially important educational endeavor for the school, did not consider the possibility of classrooms using alternative pedagogical techniques. This lack of consideration put Sarah’s general music curriculum in a contested space within the greater school curriculum, much of which could more easily conform to these administrative expectations.

My visit to Sarah’s classroom was during her second year at Adams Junior High, a large

school building with many teachers. Sarah had not yet had the time to build the relationships with administration or other teachers necessary to move general music from contested space to home place. Each day Sarah entered the school building through a side door near her classroom and often did not interact with teachers outside the music wing. At the faculty meeting I attended, Sarah did not know the names of the teachers with whom she was placed in a group, evidence that being new in a large school is sometimes isolating for teachers.

On the other hand, Sarah had established a home place within the music department and was working to make a home place within her classroom. It was clear to me, through her interactions with others, that Sarah had established a home within the music department. She was respected by the other music teachers and had established collegial relationships with them. In a large school such as Adams Junior High, much work of teachers is isolated within departments, so Sarah's work in establishing relationships with other music colleagues is appropriate. These relationships may extend beyond the music department as she gains more experience in this particular school community. In addition, it was clear from observations, that many students felt a sense of "home" within Sarah's classroom. As students worked on projects, they felt free to move around the classroom and engage comfortably with teacher and peers. Sarah's interactions with students were positive and the students seemed very comfortable with her teaching style and what was expected of them as learners.

In addition, Sarah also felt the course label, "general music," was contested by students in her school; this was so prominent that she wanted to change the name of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade course to "music appreciation."

*It's almost like branding. . . . Kids are used to general music meaning a certain thing and that means that they go to class and they do these kinds of activities and then it's concert*

*time and they prepare for the concert and they present at concert and that's what general music means to them [from elementary school]. So I'm rebranding [my class] under the name 'music appreciation' because I don't have that concert thing, I don't have that singing and then maybe they will see it as a slightly different expectation and come in with a more positive manner. So that was my general thinking on it because really I don't think that I will change a lot of the content unless I find something really cool that I want to do.*

Whether or not “music appreciation” and “general music” are synonymous is beyond the scope of this study; however, this change did go into effect at Adams Junior High during the 2015-2016 school year. It was clear to me, through her interactions with others, that Sarah had established a home within the music department and within her classroom, but that this feeling of home did not extend throughout the school.

Similarly, though perhaps more striking, is Michael's experience as he traversed the contested space of three classrooms and two schools each day. The overwhelming sense I experienced during my week with Michael was one of homelessness; carrying all of our belongings, we moved from classroom to classroom, school to school, rarely pausing to take a deep breath. While Michael knew a few teachers at each school, it was clear that his reassignment to two different schools prohibited him from connecting to either school on the deeper level often required to really communicate and connect with either students or colleagues.

This sense of homelessness extends, though is not a direct result of, the absence of value Michael felt was placed on his music curriculum. Michael was expected to teach general music at Kennedy School without access to *any* supplies. He was regularly and unceremoniously kicked out of one or more of his classroom spaces because there was something perceived as

more important that needed to occur in the space. For example, during my visit, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade choir took a field trip to record a performance at the local PBS station; however, on the day of the field trip, Michael was told he could not use the cafeteria stage for his class, so we all crammed into a middle school language arts classroom for a final rehearsal. While Michael modified his teaching without complaining, he perceived this day-of change in classroom space as a devaluing of what he was trying to achieve with his students. In discussing some of these challenges to his music curriculum, Michael says,

*I mean I think what's been educational for me this week is [this:] when you have a visitor, just somebody stepping into your classroom you become more aware. Like I've had moments this week where I've felt like under-prepared and that happens often here. . . . but the thing is it's really heightened . . . how exasperating this schedule and teacher resources and these issues this year have been, and things that are like literally just beyond my control. And explaining to you like I did earlier in the week about how I had basically one week to come into this classroom [at Jackson School] to see what I had to [do to] get it ready, and the whole year you're playing catch-up with maybe forty minutes in your day to do anything. . . . It's challenging. There is—I can't tell you how many teachers there are in [this district] who are like that. So we can tell you what the challenges are and it's crazy. It's work. The miracle of teaching in a lot of places like this is that you're asked to do more with less and the miracle here is that most people actually do.*

While Michael had a classroom and more materials at Jackson School, he did not have keyboards for all students, four of the keyboards were not connected to electricity, and teachers regularly entered his room to remove students for remediation without even acknowledging Michael's

presence or authority in the room. In both of his school communities, Michael's classes were contested spaces, spaces where curriculum, learning, and teacher authority were regularly undermined and disrespected by other teachers or the administration.

Based on my observations and Michael's perceptions, it was clear that music education, particularly Michael's general music classes at both Kennedy School and Jackson School, were undervalued by an administration focused on other priorities. When Michael and I completed errands together on the snow day, one of our tasks was to collect piano keyboards from the high school and take them to Jackson School because Michael's work request had gone unattended for over three weeks. In further support of the devalued nature of Michael's curriculum, Michael told me in September 2015 that the person hired in his recently vacated position at Kennedy School quit after two and a half weeks. The information Michael received from a former colleague was that the principal did not intend to hire another music teacher, but rather a "creative person" around whom the job would be shaped. While it is impossible to know the reasoning of the principal, Michael felt that the music program at Kennedy, particularly the middle level chorus he built over four years, was not valued at that school.

**General Music Home Places.** In building her curriculum around three instrumental performance styles and end-of-unit public performances, Rachel worked to move middle level general music from a contested space to a home place over time. When Rachel began teaching at Washington Junior/Senior High School, she perceived general music as a contested space, a class ignored and undervalued by the administration. Rachel perceived this school-wide belief as the result of the "notebook" curriculum utilized by her predecessor. Consequently, she spent many years working against this devaluing both within the music department and within the whole school community. Rachel began this work her first semester in the position by having students

perform publically for the school. These public performances, along with her popular Guest Artist series, have enabled her to gain recognition for her program—a general music class that has an important home place within the greater school. The attendance and support of colleagues and administrators at Rachel’s popular Guest Artist Series attests to how the attitude toward general music has transformed during her tenure.

In addition, my observations indicate that by developing relationships, Rachel has overcome the contested space of general music in her school community. Throughout my week with Rachel, we continually discussed relationships and the importance she placed on developing relationships with colleagues and administration. Rachel had no questions or concerns about approaching her administration or stating her opinion clearly in a discussion with other teachers. She regularly communicated with other music colleagues as well as the middle school “core” interdisciplinary teams. While Rachel’s naturally gregarious personality makes this relationship building work with colleagues and administrators appear easy, any teacher can work, over time, to establish these kinds of relationships that help to move general music to a home place.

Though Beth perceived music education as a low priority when she arrived at St. Mary’s Catholic Elementary School, she has moved general music to a home place through her attention to the needs of students. By creating a music classroom where all students are welcomed and respected, Beth demonstrated to other teachers the value of music education. In teaching every student each year, Beth developed close, often loving, relationships with students which further conveyed a feeling of home in her classroom.

Additionally, the daily ritual of morning worship, and Beth’s participation in this activity, strengthened the sense of school community, something I felt from almost my first moment at the school. Beth regularly leads Morning Worship and is responsible for the organization of the

school's masses to celebrate holy days. These responsibilities make Beth very visible to everyone in the school. She is often called upon for school related information, such as instructions for how to organize the Stations of the Cross presentation, because of her longevity at the school. Though Beth did not spend much time with her colleagues during my visit, it was clear from her actions and interactions that she felt as though she belonged to the school.

Finally, Beth's work in establishing a relationship with Sister (her principal) has helped to move general music from a contested space to a home place. She and Sister have a close, personal friendship developed over many years. This relationship with Sister has evolved, in part, from Beth's need to educate her principal about the purpose of music education. This was a process of demonstrating that general music has value to the total intellectual and spiritual education of students in grades K-8. It is through her attention to student needs, her involvement in the school community, and her relationship with Sister that Beth has moved general music from a contested space within the overall school community to a home place throughout her time at St. Mary's.

### **Beyond the School Community**

Another facet of the contested spaces and home places dialectic is the understanding of middle level general music within the wider educational community beyond a particular school. Rachel and Beth demonstrate that movement along this dialectic is possible within a school community given time and relationship building. However, while much of the work of this dialectic happens locally through individual music teachers, some of this work also occurs within the disciplines of music education and middle level education and indirectly impacts the in-school work of individual teachers.

**In Music Education.** As music educators, there is still a long way to move across the



dialectic from contested spaces to home places in general music, particularly at the middle level. Change must start within the discipline if music teachers are to convince administrators, colleagues, parents, and students that musical learning should continue through the middle level.

According to results from the survey, only half of middle school music teacher respondents believe general music should be required by all students at the middle level. The other half of the survey respondents believe it should be required of only some students or not required at all. This question was asked of all survey respondents ( $N = 1,311$ ) prior to respondents stating whether or not they had previously taught middle school general music and thus provides the perspective of the wider population of middle school music teachers. Survey results indicated that those who have experience teaching middle school general music ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) are more likely to believe general music should be required of middle level students than those who have never taught this course ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ );  $t(1309) = -5.1488$ ,  $p = 0.0000$ .<sup>60</sup> However, survey results also indicated that those self-identifying as general music teachers, regardless of experience teaching middle level general music, are more likely than those not self-identifying as general music teachers to think general music should be required at the middle level (see Table 6.4). Of particular interest here is that all independent group t-tests conducted in this section resulted in statistically significant results and confidence intervals that did not overlap at the 95% confidence interval. These results suggest that there is a marked difference in opinion among music educator respondents regarding whether middle school general music is a necessary component of the total education for all young adolescents.

Comprehensive music curriculum with or without public performances and music education that serves all students, regardless of talent or ability, should not be seen as less

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<sup>60</sup>Unequal variances, Satterthwaite's approximation calculated

Table 6.4

*Independent group t-tests for Requiring General Music and Teacher Self-Identity*

Item	See Self as General Music Teacher	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	95% CI		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Pr( T > t )	Pr(T<t)
All Respondents ( <i>N</i> = 1,315)	N	1,075	2.36	0.78	2.30	2.42	-5.4382	461.742	0.0000	0.0000
	Y	240	2.64	0.63	2.56	2.72				
Respondents Experienced Teaching Middle School General Music ( <i>N</i> = 834)	N	618	2.36	0.78	2.30	2.42	-7.3686	427.443	0.0000	0.0000
	Y	216	2.65	0.63	2.56	2.73				

valuable within the field of music education if teachers are to ever feel equipped to make this claim to those outside of music education. Middle level general music teachers who feel that general music is a contested space within their school community need resources from the wider music education community in the form of curricular materials, pedagogical strategies, and advocacy techniques. Music educators who have achieved home places for their middle level general music class need to speak up, help colleagues, and challenge others to rethink the potential of musical learning for all middle level students (see Burton, 2012; McAnally, 2009; Regelski, 2004). Further research is needed to understand the resources needed by music educators for both the teaching of and within-school advocacy for middle level general music.

**In Middle Level Education.** Movement along this dialectic also requires change within the field of middle level education. Awareness of the purpose of general music within the wider middle level curriculum as well as an acknowledgement that music teachers (and other “specialists”) have value to contribute to the school’s interdisciplinary teams are important next steps within the field of middle level education. The middle level concept values young

adolescents experiencing a wide-ranging curriculum, what is termed “exploratory.”

Middle school is the finding place. . . . Exploration, in fact, is the aspect of a successful middle school curriculum that most directly and fully reflects the nature and needs of the majority of young adolescents, most of whom are ready for an exploratory process.

Although some experiences or courses [often including general music] may be labeled exploratory, it should not be assumed they are, therefore, nonacademic. . . . Exploratory is an attitude and approach, not a classification of content. (NMSA, 2010, p. 20)

In the field of middle level education, these exploratory courses are intended to pique student interest and diversify their experiences, not (as they are sometimes interpreted) devalue sequential musical learning. While *This We Believe* specifically addresses music learning as one aspect of the exploratory curriculum necessary to the overall curriculum of young adolescents, music teachers are often ignored within their school unless they, like Rachel, make a special effort to spend time with one or more of the school’s interdisciplinary teams. Though scheduling creativity would be required, administrators could alleviate this problem by ensuring that “specialists” share planning time with “core” teachers. Music teachers need to call upon the middle level concept and speak the language of other teachers at their school, but they also need administrators and colleagues who support their interest in becoming involved in the total school community beyond the music department.

This dialectic is challenging because it appears that home places are preferable to contested spaces and that there are steps a music teacher can taken in order to easily move from contested spaces to home places. However, this is in fact, not the case. According to Stauffer, “place is nexus and synthesis of space, time, and experience, and it is constantly changing” (2009, p. 176). While a teacher may succeed in establishing his/her work within the school

community such that it feels as though a home place is established, this perception can easily change due to any number of factors that alter the dynamic of a school or the teacher's place within the school. For example, administrative changes, new district or state curricular expectations, or the music teacher's personal circumstances are just some of the many factors that might impact a teacher's perception of his/her class as a home place. Moving across this dialectic from contested spaces to a home places, and maintaining an ongoing sense of home place, is a slow, complicated, and often thankless process that requires, among other things, teacher personality traits such as tenacity, persistence, and determination. Rachel and Beth perceive their general music classes as home places within their school community based on the work they have done over time to establish that feeling; however, they must work daily to maintain that perception. In contrast, Sarah and Michael have not had the necessary time to work through this dialectic within their school community. Though both Sarah and Michael have made some efforts to gain administrative acknowledgement for their music curriculum, they both need more time within their school community to feel as though their general music curricula has found a home place.

Working day to day to teach students a curriculum that is contested within the school community pushes directly against the philosophical beliefs a teacher holds. While Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael each believe strongly in specific aspects of musical learning, when pushed by administrative expectations (in big or little ways), their philosophical beliefs often bend to accommodate. Longevity at a school and relationship building with colleagues and administrators appear to be the antidotes to the contested nature of general music. Music teachers capable of pushing back against administrative mandates or working hard to garner respect for their program are needed, particularly when it comes to middle level general music.

This work cannot fall exclusively on the individual teacher in the local setting. By communicating across disciplinary boundaries through the common language of education, the disciplines of music education and middle level education can help both administrators and teachers understand the importance of general music to the experiences of young adolescents, thus alleviating some of the philosophical strain placed on music teachers negotiating the contested spaces and home places dialectic.

### **Focus on the Local**

In taking Jorgensen's (1997) dialectic approach, this discussion section has raised three complexities for middle level general music that emerged from the study: making and receiving, children and emerging adults, and contested spaces and home places. While these are not the only tensions that impact the work of music teachers who teach this class, these were the most prominent dialectics that emerged from a combined analysis of the survey and narrative data.

These dialectics are not easy spaces in which to live as a middle level general music teacher. They challenge teachers to determine their guiding principles, choose their curriculum, select their pedagogy, establish relationships, and work within their school community. According to Jorgensen, among the "advantages of this dialectical approach are its open-endedness, interconnectedness, and situatedness, allowing for multiple solutions to educational problems" (2003, p. 13). A teacher need not remain fixed within the dialectic, but can move within (and potentially beyond) it as needed. Each music teacher must find his or her own balancing point, derived in part from his or her personal musical and pedagogical strengths.

These dialectics require in-context thinking on the part of the individual music teacher, thinking beyond the boundaries of these dialectics or any other bounded concepts challenging their work. According to Jorgensen, music education is filled with "inherent fuzziness at the

edges of its theoretical concepts and their practical expressions, . . . [resulting] from the complex and dialectical nature of the music education enterprise and causes theoretical and practical difficulties in articulating ideas and implementing them, or in formulating strategies and rationalizing them” (2003, p. 119). Based on this study, one means of navigating these dialectics is a focus on the local school and community context.

### **Navigating the Dialectics Locally: The Narratives**

This section focuses on how the narrative participants navigate the three dialectics identified through a focus on the local student, school, and classroom context. Curricular, pedagogical, and relationship-building decisions are made based on a focus on the local context. Each narrative participant does this differently because each learning community faces its own unique challenges.

Michael negotiated the three dialectics by focusing on the specific students in his classes. He was daily challenged by major administrative issues within which all of his teaching occurs, but he chose to look past these issues to focus on the needs of his students. One of the ways he did this was by connecting musical learning to the music students’ experiences outside of school. Michael’s popular music arrangements for the choir and the creation of movie soundtracks in general music, enabled him to connect with his students and lead a successful program under the most challenging of circumstances. When asked how teachers should make decisions about which curricula or pedagogy to choose, Michael’s response emphasized a focus on a teacher’s particular students:

*I think that you have to gauge your students; I think that’s a big local thing. You just have to look at your community and see what types of resources they have, where these kids are coming from, what is your graduation rate, what types of challenges you have in*

*the district, what are the things that your kids have, what they don't have, what are they most interested in, are they going 'ugh,' and stay away from that. I think you have to make judicious choices in that, because there are certain things a kid might say too, like 'oh I hate that' and you might say, 'let's try a bit of this too,' you know inevitably it's kind of hard to be the all-you-can-eat buffet.*

Philosophically, Michael's use of music chosen by his students for repertoire and activities is most directly aligned with the beliefs stated in *This We Believe*: "teaching approaches should capitalize on the skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of young adolescents; use multiple intelligences; involve students' individual learning styles; and recognize the need for regular physical movement . . . when learning experiences capitalize on students' cultural, experiential, and personal backgrounds, new concepts build on knowledge students already possess" (NMSA, 2010, pp. 22-23). Connecting directly to the students' outside-of-school musical interests and experiences was one way that Michael navigated the dialectical tensions by focusing on the local.

In a different approach, Beth also negotiated the dialectics through her local knowledge of the school and community. Beth knew her local context well and realized that students at St. Mary's Catholic Elementary have parents who provided regular after school and weekend enrichment. Beth focused her general music curriculum on the experience of a broad and diverse music curriculum because she knew that parents were able to provide music lessons or regular concert attendance for interested students. In addition, Beth tried to expand the music curriculum content beyond what students were likely to experience in their homes or communities. Beth said that her local knowledge of the large German heritage population at her school meant that she did not need to introduce the polka to students (a musical form with which

many engage in their homes and communities), but rather she focused on introducing her students to more diverse musical genres and experiences. For example, instead of polka Beth said, *“I can teach these kids the dance for the dragon for Chinese New Year.”* Beth negotiated the tensions and choices along the dialectics by making decisions, based in local knowledge that expanded students’ musical experiences beyond what they were likely to receive at home.

Rachel drew on her local knowledge of student disinterest in general music to create a home place in general music through her guiding principle: the Circle of Courage. This is yet another method for negotiating the dialectics locally. In her narrative Rachel spoke about knowing that her general music students do not want to participate in traditional music ensembles and that they enter her classroom looking at the seventh grade music requirement with a negative attitude. Using her Circle of Courage philosophy, Rachel worked to overcome this student attitude by encouraging belonging to the group through the three non-traditional performance ensembles. In addition, Rachel’s local knowledge of her students’ lack of monetary resources impacted her decision to focus on providing opportunities for her students to share their newly learned musical talents with others—a chance for students who could not regularly do so to give generously to others. Rachel’s knowledge of her local situation, not only student attitudes, but also students’ lack of monetary resources, made the Circle of Courage and its focus on belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity an effective principle that shaped her negotiation of the dialectics.

Similarly, Sarah also used local knowledge of student attitudes toward enrollment in required general music to negotiate the dialectics. First, Sarah worked to make connections with students, a first step in establishing a home place in her general music classroom. The way in which students entered the classroom and began their work with little or no prompting indicated



a level of comfort and ownership over the learning in general music. Sarah's project-based curriculum helped to shape the environment in this way. Second, students at Sarah's school possessed attitudes toward required general music similar to those in Rachel's community. Sarah hoped to overcome negative student attitudes toward the general music requirement by changing the general music course name (as discussed above), and hopefully eliminate this local issue regarding general music. Because Sarah was new to her school community, she was just beginning to gain the kind of local knowledge of students, school, and community necessary to negotiate the dialectics. For teachers new to their school communities, Sarah can serve as an example of one way small steps can be taken to understand the local environment and change the learning environment accordingly. As Sarah becomes more familiar with her local context, she will likely make additional decisions on the dialectics in keeping with her new local knowledge.

### **Navigating the Dialectics Locally: Other Contexts**

There are many other ways a middle level general music teacher might use the local context to negotiate one or more of the three dialectics discussed herein. In my own story of middle level general music that began this dissertation, my knowledge of student interests and questions about music led to a study of instruments and the ukulele project that shaped our school year. I chose to negotiate the dialectics by beginning with my students, the specific young adolescents with whom I worked. Any local effort undertaken will likely raise additional questions about the nature of middle level general music, as mine certainly did, but these questions are best answered within the local context. Below, I suggest some additional local efforts general music teachers at the middle level might consider in order to negotiate the three dialectics.

There are a number of things a teacher might do in order to alleviate tensions that arise

from the making and receiving dialectic. If local budgets prevent acquisition of needed resources, teachers might use tools at hand such as the voice or hand-made instruments made from recycled materials or seek outside funding for supplies or musical instruments from local arts councils, state music education associations, or local music stores. Teachers without diverse musical knowledge or lack of experience teaching one of the many facets of music curriculum might seek out local workshops and other professional development opportunities. These teachers might also return to the district or state standard documents, the National Core Arts Standards or even the 1994 National Standards for Music Education for suggestions, or review the many NAfME produced publications derived from the 1994 standards (see Bush, 2007; Hinckley & Shull, 1996; McAnally, 2009; McAnally, 2011). Should a teacher find students uninterested in the topics selected, listening to students regarding the musical topics they most want to study or collaborating with students in the design of a project or assessment are also ways to negotiate the making and receiving dialectic through a local lens. The more a teacher knows about students' outside of school musical knowledge, experiences, or interests, the more a teacher can utilize this local knowledge to shape the curriculum within or beyond the making and receiving dialectic.

There is much local work teachers challenged by the tensions along the child and emerging adult dialectic can do. These teachers may not be able to change the grade levels served by their school community or change the school ecology; however, local efforts need not be so large. Music teachers might participate in or work to form a group of local teachers devoted to discussing and implementing developmentally appropriate practices for young adolescents (regardless of what occurs within the larger school ecology). Teachers could form a lunch or after-school focus group of students to advise on how the pedagogy of general music

might be changed to better meet the needs of students. Professional development opportunities, such as the AMLE annual conference, while potentially beyond the local, could then impact the next steps a teacher takes locally.

Teachers struggling with the contested spaces and home places dialectic in middle level general music can initiate a number of local efforts to help their school understand the importance of this course. Active participation in school activities (such as attending student sporting events) is one way to earn the respect of both students and colleagues. Teachers might also seek out opportunities to develop relationships with colleagues outside the music department, for example: collaborating on an interdisciplinary project, participating on an all-school committee, or attending middle school team meetings. In addition, it is important to make other school faculty aware of the successes of the general music program through hallway displays, performances, informances, or community service outreach. In order for music teachers to find home spaces within the school or establish home spaces within the middle level general music classroom, local efforts must reach out to the students and faculty of the larger school community and bring them into the work done in general music.

Though the negotiation of these dialects is as unique as each music teacher assigned to teach middle level general music, the local environment directly impacts the curricular and pedagogical choices made in general music classes. The ideas presented here and in each of the narratives provide readers with access to a variety of strategies that may or may not work in a different local environment. Though I first thought that I could find some commonalities to enable other music teachers to teach middle level general music more easily, the dominant presence of each school's local conditions outweighs any overarching principle. These narratives support Jorgensen's call for researchers to "seek ideas and practices that are

appropriate for or right in certain situations” (1997, p. 92). As a consequence, readers must decide whether or not the ideas presented here are right in their own local situation. Though the middle level concept provides the directive that curricular and pedagogical decisions be made through the lens of young adolescent development,

The demands of each situation cannot be met by a single universal philosophy or method of instruction no matter how philosophically and practically defensible it might appear to be. Rather, each music teacher must fit the right instructional approaches to a set of demands in some measure unique to a particular situation. (Jorgensen, 1997, p. 92)

Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael would agree. The local context, knowledge of the students, their families, the school, and the community ultimately enable these teachers, some more successfully than others, to navigate the tangled web of dialectics confronting middle level general music. When the local is emphasized, the boundaries of the dialectics become pliable.

### **Summary: The Research Questions**

At the beginning of this study, I proposed three research questions to guide my empirical investigation. These three questions focused on the philosophical beliefs and lived experiences that impacted music teachers’ design and implementation of general music at the middle grades.

- **RQ1:** How and to what extent are middle level music teachers’ beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with *This We Believe*?
- **RQ2:** How and to what extent are music teachers’ curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice preparation, professional journals, collegial conversations, professional development, teaching experience, and personal musical engagement?

- **RQ3:** How do philosophical beliefs and lived experience influence the design of a middle level general music course?

Below I will briefly answer these three questions as a summary of the data and discussion that has already been presented.

### **Research Question 1**

My first research question examined whether or not middle level music teachers are making decisions congruent with the principles of curriculum, instruction, and assessment described in *This We Believe*, a major document elaborating the tenets of the middle level concept. The present study found that the music teachers surveyed/consulted are somewhat, but not fully, in agreement with the middle level concept. According to the survey findings, music educators are largely unaware of the *This We Believe* document. However, this document is not the only means for obtaining knowledge and skills aligned with the middle level concept.

Both phases of this study indicated that music teachers teaching middle level general music do align themselves with some of the principles of curriculum, instruction, and assessment common in middle level philosophy. Both survey and narrative respondents prioritized integrated and relevant curriculum, the use of technology, and pedagogies that promote active learning. While music teachers utilize these techniques in differing amounts, these are aspects of the middle level concept, specifically stated in *This We Believe*, prioritized by the middle school general music teacher respondents.

In contrast, both phases of this study indicated that assessment is an area of weak alignment with the middle level concept. Many music educators utilize diverse forms of assessments, including, among others, playing tests, in-class observations, written work, and student reflections. The use of multiple forms of assessment within a class is an important

component of both good teaching and alignment with the middle level concept. However, both phases of the study indicated that very few teachers individualize assessments in general music, thus requiring all students to demonstrate knowledge through the same medium. Perhaps most striking is the limited number of music teachers who purposefully collaborate with students in developing assessments. Though this is a time-consuming process, teachers who work to individualize assessments and/or collaborate with students on assessments are in greater alignment with the middle level concept than those who do not. Assessment is an area of growth necessary for the music education community to more fully align with the ideas found in the middle level concept.

Of particular importance are the findings that link a teacher's knowledge of the *This We Believe* document and other aspects investigated on the survey. First, knowledge of the *This We Believe* document is a strong indicator of a teacher's preference for teaching middle level students. Second, awareness of the document is a statistically significant indicator that a teacher prioritizes aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that align with beliefs stated in the document (as assessed on the survey). These results suggest that wider distribution of the *This We Believe* document within the music education community might serve to improve music teacher alignment with and enactment of the middle level concept within general music classes.

The findings from research question one suggest some areas of alignment and some areas of improvement for middle level general music teachers. While the *This We Believe* document is not the only authority on middle level philosophy, nor should it be held above others, this document was used to guide this study because of its clear articulation of principles of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the middle level. Further research is needed to better understand how music teachers interpret this document written primarily for non-arts teachers

and also whether the findings presented here are representative of all middle level music teachers or only those with experience teaching general music.

### **Research Question 2**

The impact of a teacher's lived experience or his/her professional knowledge landscape was investigated in research question two. Clandinin and Connelly have defined a teacher's "professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things,... an intellectual and moral landscape" (1995, p. 5). For example, a teacher's current personal life experiences may have as much impact on classroom decisions as does his or her preservice preparation that occurred ten years prior. Present and past, both inside and outside the classroom, are all dimensions of a teacher's lived experience and can impact the curricular and pedagogical decisions made by middle level general music teachers.

In this study, survey respondents and narrative participants are in agreement that their teaching experience, personal musical engagement, and professional relationships have a strong influence on their decisions in the classroom. It appears that inservice experiences, both through the act of teaching as well as engagement with others within the school community, are the aspects of lived experience most influential on the curricular and pedagogical decisions teachers make. The narrative portion of the study highlighted that inservice experiences were compounded by factors in the school environment such as grade configuration, administrative demands, access to resources, etc. Further research is needed to understand this connection more clearly.

Both phases of this study indicate that preservice teacher education is far less influential on the curricular and pedagogical decisions teachers make in the middle level general music classroom than inservice experiences. This finding is most clear in the talk of the narrative

participants who recall very little from their preservice preparation relevant to their current teaching circumstances. In addition, less than 30% of survey respondents reported that they perceived preservice as impacting their work in middle level general music to a great extent. Finally, narrative participant Beth is an example of a successful general music teacher without preservice preparation in music education. Further research is needed to investigate whether preservice in the middle level concept or preservice preparing teachers to teach general music to young adolescents alters this finding. It is beyond the scope of this study to speculate whether any change to preservice education in music education will impact this finding.

The findings from research question two suggest that the lived experience of teachers impacts their curricular and pedagogical decisions in the classroom, particularly those experiences occurring as part of inservice. This finding potentially means that school communities and administrations who support music education or who have strong middle level philosophies impact the teaching of general music in positive ways. This finding may also mean that the opposite is true. More research is needed to understand exactly how a teacher's lived experience within the school community impacts the teaching of middle level general music.

### **Research Question 3**

Research question three asked: How do philosophical beliefs and lived experience influence the design of a middle level general music course? One interesting finding in this study is how teachers prioritize performance in middle school general music. In dialectic one, an analysis of the survey data revealed that teachers who self-identify as general music teachers (their lived experience) are more likely to include performance in their general music curriculum than those teachers self-identifying as ensemble directors. This is seemingly in contrast to evidence in the narratives. Beth, who identifies as a general music teacher, believes performance



is the purview of performing ensembles, not general music; in contrast, Rachel, who self-identifies as a choir director, believes general music should be a series of performance-based learning experiences. This is one example of how a teacher's lived experience, his or her musical expertise, can impact the curricular choices made. More research is needed in order to further investigate this aspect of the middle school general music curriculum.

For the four narrative participants, the curriculum and pedagogy of their middle level general music courses are intimately tied to their personal philosophical beliefs and their lived experience. Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael each articulated a set of beliefs to which they held firmly, beliefs developed over time and often directly tied to a specific event or series of experiences in their lives. This is perhaps no great revelation. However, it is these teacher's individual lived experiences, sometimes challenged by administrative mandates, which take precedent and sometimes challenged their philosophical beliefs when making decisions in the classroom. When faced with an administrative expectation that students perform in public, Beth, who does not believe performing should be part of general music, complied with the directive. While Sarah disagreed with the administrative expectation that she change her Purpose and Task statements daily, she attempted to explain her project-based perspective, but ultimately tried to meet her administrators' expectations. These are but two examples of the local outweighing personal philosophical beliefs. These teachers thoughtfully considered these administrative expectations and then sought ways to integrate them by bending their personal philosophical beliefs to accommodate. This is not to say that the narrative participants were easily swayed or allowed the administration to dictate their curriculum. They held firm to their beliefs, but the local almost always trumped the bigger philosophical ideas the teacher espoused. Most teachers are able to accommodate the local into their belief system and still maintain a curriculum aligned

with their philosophical beliefs. It is not until external local expectations reach peak capacity, as they did in Michael's case, that philosophical beliefs win out and a teacher must decide to "break" philosophically with his or her beliefs to keep a job or "break" with the local context and try to find another position. The intersection of lived experience, particularly the local context, and philosophical beliefs, and the negotiation of the two is what makes each general music classroom different from the next.

### **Limitations**

It is necessary to address a few limitations of this mixed methods study. First, there are some limitations of the survey instrument. A major limitation of the survey instrument was the internal consistency of the items designed for the TWB4 scale. This scale was dropped from the analysis because of the weak internal consistency of the items. Refinement of the survey instrument would strengthen this scale and the items within it. Another limitation is that not all Likert scales used on the survey instrument were identical. While the results from these variables were standardized prior to creating the scores reported herein, it is possible that the results might be clearer using identical Likert scales. However, modification of the Likert scales may prevent a clear understanding of the survey questions, which pilot testing and cognitive interviews suggested were very clear. The ease of analysis versus the comprehensibility of survey questions would require careful consideration.

Second, both the survey and narratives have an important limitation in common: generalizability. While the survey was national in scope, the response rate of 8.5% is considered small, even for electronically distributed surveys. Despite the similarities between those who responded early to the survey and those who responded late (see Chapter 3), the findings from this survey cannot be generalized to the entire population of NAFME members who identify as

middle school music teachers. In addition, narrative research does not strive for generalizability, but rather focuses on the particular. One cannot assume that the stories of Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael represent all possibilities among music educators teaching middle level general music. While music educators may identify with one teacher more than others, it is more likely that teachers will identify, in part, with all four participants or perhaps feel that their personal perspective is not articulated in any of these narratives. Rachel, Beth, Sarah, and Michael's stories are particular, to both these teachers' individual experiences and also to their 2014-2015 school year, and thus generalizability is a limitation of this study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

A major implication of this study is that there is a need for communication between the fields of middle level education and music education. On the one hand, the integration of the discourse of middle level philosophy into music education, both at the preservice and practitioner levels, might alleviate some of the challenges middle level general music teachers face in negotiating the dialectics. On the other hand, middle level administrators and educators also have a responsibility to involve all teachers in their school, not just those in core subjects, in conversations about young adolescent development, individual student needs, and the interdisciplinary work that occurs within schools. This study begins one possible avenue of discussion across the two disciplines; however, significantly more work is needed in this arena.

In addition, the research presented here needs to be broadened to include a larger number of music educators. First, additional surveys, potentially targeting individual state music education associations might yield more complete data and potentially address some of the generalizability issues faced in this study. Second, future research adding additional music teacher narratives to the four presented here would further illuminate the complexities of the

dialectical spaces within middle school general music and potentially raise new dialectics for consideration. More perspectives on this issue of general music are important to both confirm and further complicate the current understanding of middle level general music.

Throughout this final chapter, additional implications for future research were articulated. Future research might investigate the relationship between teacher musical expertise, or how a teacher identifies him/herself as a music teacher, and the prioritization of performance in middle level general music curriculum. In a similar vein, research might investigate the labels “music teacher” and “creative musician” and whether teachers who prefer these labels make curricular decisions different from music educators who identify as general music teachers or ensemble directors. Research into the authentic interactions or relationships established between music teachers and students in general music might serve to provide guidance to music educators on how best to work with young adolescents uninterested in enrolling in general music. Additional research on the school communities of middle level general music teachers might include the grade levels served at a teacher’s school or whether the music teacher serves one or more than one school. How music teachers are integrated into the interdisciplinary teams and other structures of middle level schools and the philosophy espoused and/or implemented in the school community may also help to illuminate how a teacher’s inservice experiences influence general music decision making. More research is needed regarding school ecology and music teachers’ integration into the community. Finally, the field of music education needs information regarding the curricular resources, pedagogical preparation, advocacy materials, and support needed by music teachers in order to help encourage the creation of middle level general music classes that are positive, home places for both teachers and students. Each of these avenues would benefit the middle level and music education communities and increase knowledge about

general music in middle school and the responsible teachers. Investigations into general music at the middle school level are encouraged, as this remains an under-investigated aspect of both music and middle level education.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this dissertation, I have gone in search of middle level general music. Though I initially hoped to find an answer to the question, ‘What is middle school general music?’ I quickly learned that the complexities of teaching general music at the middle level defy easy categorization. How an educator chooses to teach middle level general music is a complexity of multiple dialectics negotiated over time within each teacher’s personal and professional contexts. The “how” and “what” of middle school general music cannot be found in a book or even a series of books.

Jorgensen suggests, “genuine, ongoing, and widespread dialogue constitutes a key to transforming music education” (2003, p. 144), of particular importance, I would argue, to middle level general music. The same can be said for middle level education. Both fields need to open a dialogue about the class designed to provide music education for all young adolescents, general music. This dissertation attempts to initiate one avenue of dialogue on this topic. Too often those teaching general music in the middle grades function in isolation without the support of other teachers within or beyond their school and without preservice knowledge upon which to draw. The curriculum and pedagogy discussed herein are just ideas, both highly effective and occasionally ineffective, but these ideas illuminate discussions necessary for the fields of music education and middle level both independently and in collaboration. Each music teacher seeking to improve his or her middle level general music practice should participate in this dialogue, but must remember that his/her primary concern is the young adolescents in the room, their needs,

their experiences, and their attitudes toward music learning. Only by engaging with the young adolescents at hand within the given school and community context can a successful general music program at the middle level be developed.

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## APPENDIX A: MLGMM SURVEY INSTRUMENT

These screen shots were taken from SurveyGizmo.com version of the MLGMM survey instrument completed by respondents.

Dear Music Education Colleague,

This survey is designed to investigate the principles that guide music educators' decisions about middle school curriculum and pedagogy. As a knowledgeable middle school music educator, your completion of the survey is an important contribution to this study and should take about 15-20 minutes of your time.

I am conducting this study as my dissertation research at the University of Illinois. As such, the work has been approved by the UIUC [Institutional Review Board](#). All information that is obtained during this research project will be confidential and kept secure on the University of Illinois secure server. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu).

You are also welcome to contact me or my dissertation director directly via the e-mail addresses below.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Candidate  
[cronenb2@illinois.edu](mailto:cronenb2@illinois.edu)

Dr. Jeananne Nichols, Research Director  
[nicholsj@illinois.edu](mailto:nicholsj@illinois.edu)

My bachelor's degree was a music education degree (BME, BA, BS, BM) leading to teacher certification/licensure.

*Please select one.*

- Yes
- No

I have been teaching music for \_\_\_\_ (number of) years since completing my undergraduate degree.

My current teaching assignment is located in the following geographic region of the United States:

My preferred grade level group to teach is:

*Please select one.*

- Pre-K
- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- Other

I see myself as a ...

*Please select one.*

- Band Director
- Orchestral Director
- General Music Teacher
- Choir Director
- Other

*For the question below, please check all applicable boxes on the grid. Please fill in the empty text box categories as necessary for courses outside of those categories listed.*

My **CURRENT (2014-2015)** teaching position comprises the following . . .

	PreK	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Band (concert, marching, jazz, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choir (concert, show, jazz, madrigal, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
General Music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Orchestra	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter another option"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter another option"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter another option"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is your **CURRENT (2014-2015)** teaching assignment consistent with positions you have held in the past?

*Please select one.*

- Yes  
 No

**Only those who replied “no” to the above question received this open-ended question.**

Please explain the additional courses you have taught prior to the 2014-2015 school year.

Should general music be a required course in middle school?

*Please select one.*

- Yes, required for ALL students
- Only required for SOME students
- Not required for ANY student

Would you like share your reason for your answer choice above?

At any point in your career, have you taught a middle school **general music** course?

*Please select one.*

- Yes
- No

**Only those who answered “yes” to the question above proceeded to the remaining questions.**

**In the middle school general music course(s) you have taught, what was the priority of the following content areas in your curriculum . . .**

*Please select one answer choice in each row.*

	In the <u>middle school general music course(s)</u> you have taught, what was the priority of the following content areas in your curriculum . . .				
	Essential	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Not a Priority
Western music theory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Western music history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Musical performance (piano, guitar, singing, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music listening, analysis, and evaluation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
World musics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Popular musics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music careers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music creation (improvisation or composition)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The use of technology for music creation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Challenging musical problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Historical and cultural contexts of music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**To what degree did the following influence your curricular choices (above)?**

*Please select one answer choice in each row.*

	To what degree did the following influence your curricular choices (above)?				
	A great deal	A moderate amount	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Developing knowledge and skills in alignment with the National Standards/National Core (1994/2014)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing knowledge and skills in alignment with state and/or district curriculum standards/guidelines/benchmarks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responding to the musical interests of students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Answering students' questions about music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making connections across the school curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exploring diverse forms of music and music making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utilizing the materials provided in one of the major music textbooks (e.g., <i>Spotlight on Music</i> or <i>Making Music</i> )	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empowering students to make decisions about their music education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing opportunities for student choice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**To what extent are your ideas about curriculum (above) a result of the following experiences . . .**

*Please select one answer choice in each row.*

	To what extent are your ideas about curriculum (above) a result of the following experiences . . .			
	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Small Extent	Not at All
Pre-service preparation (e.g., courses & student teaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching periodicals (e.g., <i>Journal of Music Education</i> , <i>Teaching Music</i> , or <i>General Music Today</i> , etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversations with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teaching experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal musical engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In the middle school general music course(s) you have taught, how regularly did you use the following teaching/learning strategies?

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	In the <u>middle school general music course(s)</u> you have taught, how regularly did you use the following teaching/learning strategies?				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Lectures and whole class discussions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whole class music making (teacher-directed)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independent and small group work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student-directed music making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individualized learning activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student choice in learning activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategies that engage students personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating with students when developing activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Diverse forms of assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individualized assessment (e.g., providing students in the same class with different assessments for the same unit)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating with students when developing assessments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what degree did the following formal pedagogies influence your teaching/learning strategies (above)?

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	To what degree did the following formal pedagogies influence your teaching/learning strategies (above)?				
	A great deal	A moderate amount	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Orff Schulwerk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kodaly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dalcroze	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music Learning Theory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interdisciplinary Learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
World Music Pedagogy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Constructivist Pedagogy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal Learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital and Participatory Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent are your ideas about pedagogy (above) a result of the following experiences . . .

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	To what extent are your ideas about pedagogy (above) a result of the following experiences . . .			
	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Small Extent	Not at All
Pre-service preparation (e.g., courses & student teaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching periodicals (e.g., <i>Journal of Music Education</i> , <i>Teaching Music</i> , or <i>General Music Today</i> , etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversations with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teaching experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal musical engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following are characteristics of young adolescent (ages 10-15) development. How confident are you in your knowledge of these characteristics below?

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	The following are characteristics of young adolescent (ages 10-15) development. How confident are you in your knowledge of these <u>characteristics</u> below?			
	Extremely Confident	Moderately Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not at All
Physical transitions of puberty (e.g., growth spurts, voice changes, physical development, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cognitive transitions of puberty (e.g., considering multiple ideas, ability to plan, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development of abstract thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search for competence (e.g., at what do I excel?)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development of personal identity separate from adults, particularly family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desire for personal autonomy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Desire for a place of belonging and peer acceptance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Need for support and desire for independence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uneven and unequal development amongst students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent is your confidence about young adolescent development (above) a result of the following experiences . . .

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	To what extent is your confidence about young adolescent development (above) a result of the following experiences . . .			
	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Small Extent	Not at All
Pre-service preparation (e.g., courses & student teaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching periodicals (e.g., <i>Journal of Music Education</i> , <i>Teaching Music</i> , or <i>General Music Today</i> , etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversations with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teaching experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal musical engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I am aware of *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, the middle school philosophy statement from the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE).

- Yes
- No

Are you **CURRENTLY** (2014-2015) teaching a middle school general music class?

*Please select one.*

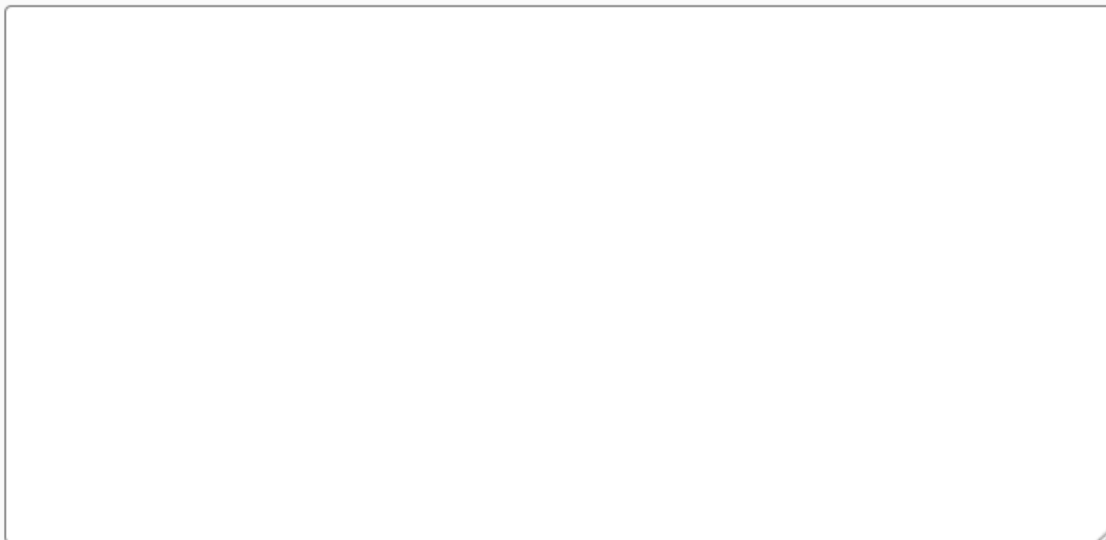
- Yes
- No

**Only those who answered “yes” to the question above received the remaining questions.**



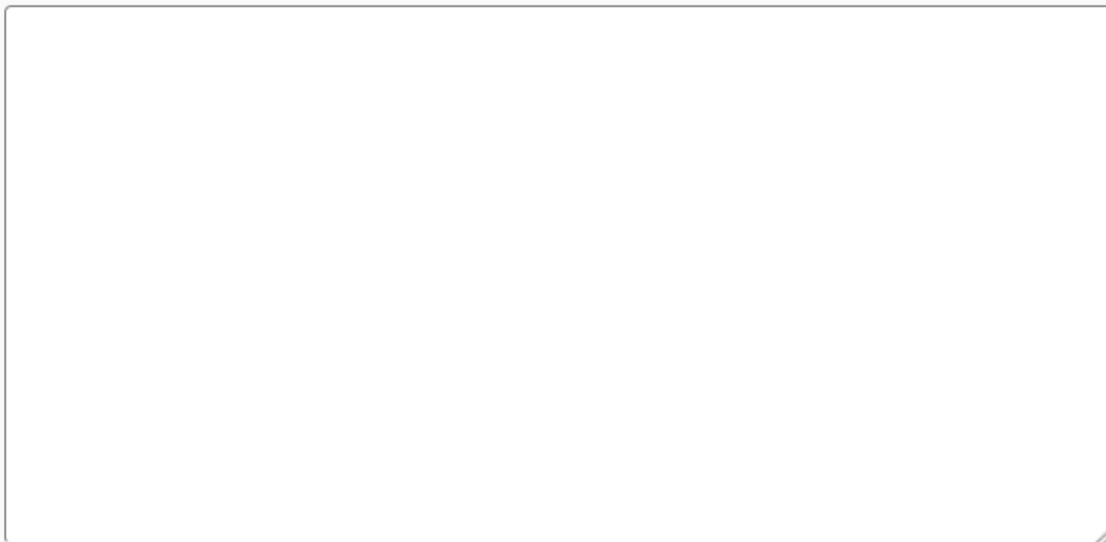
What do you use to guide your middle school general music course planning process (i.e., what materials, ideas, beliefs, curricular frameworks, etc.)?

*For this question, please share as much or as little as you like. There is no limit or requirement.*



In planning your middle school general music curriculum, what aspects of your prior experience most influence you?

*For this question, please share as much or as little as you like. There is no limit or requirement.*



Are you willing to be contacted for participation in follow-up interviews and classroom observations related to this study?

*Please select one.*

- Yes
- No

**Only those who answered “yes” to the question above received this request for contact information.**

Please provide your name and a valid e-mail address and/or phone number.

*This information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be associated with your responses on this survey.*

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your candid feedback is appreciated. Your thoughts and opinions will help to improve middle school music education.

## APPENDIX B: PILOT SURVEY INSTRUMENT

These screen shots were taken from SurveyGizmo.com version of the pilot survey instrument completed by respondents.

Dear Music Education Colleague,

This survey is designed to investigate music educators' beliefs about middle school curriculum and pedagogy. This survey is part of my dissertation research on middle school general music.

At present, this is a pilot survey, and I am seeking your feedback in order to make improvements for the national survey. The final question will ask you whether you have any issues or concerns about the survey. Please feel free to answer this honestly so that my research can improve.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois. By proceeding, you agree to the [IRB Consent Letter](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or my research director directly.

I appreciate your time.

Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Candidate  
cronenb2@illinois.edu

Dr. Jeananne Nichols, Research Director  
nicholsj@illinois.edu

### I believe the following should be part of a middle school general music curriculum . . .

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	I believe the following should be part of a middle school general music curriculum . . .				
	Very True of What I Believe	Somewhat True of What I Believe	Neutral	Somewhat Untrue of What I Believe	Very Untrue of What I Believe
Western music theory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Western music history	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Musical performance (piano, guitar, singing, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
World music genres	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Popular music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Musical interests of students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Answering students' questions about music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Solving challenging musical problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Connecting music to its historical and cultural context	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Making connections across the school curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exploring independent music making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exploring music careers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exploring music creation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using technology for music creation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A FEW aspects of musical knowledge/skills DEEPLY	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A WIDE range of musical knowledge/skills BROADLY	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing knowledge and skills in all nine National Standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The materials provided in one of the major music textbooks (e.g., <i>Spotlight on Music</i> or <i>Making Music</i> )	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### To what extent are your ideas about curriculum (above) a result of the following experiences . . .

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	To what extent are your ideas about curriculum (above) a result of the following experiences . . .			
	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Small Extent	Not at All
Pre-service preparation (e.g., courses & student teaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching periodicals (e.g., <i>Journal of Music Education</i> , <i>Teaching Music</i> , or <i>General Music Today</i> , etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversations with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teaching experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal musical engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### In a middle school general music course, how developmentally appropriate are:

*Please select one answer choice in each row.*

In a middle school general music course, how developmentally appropriate are:						
	Appropriate	Somewhat Appropriate	Neutral	Somewhat Inappropriate	Inappropriate	I don't know
Lectures and whole class discussions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whole class music making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independent and small group work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student-directed music making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multiple approaches to teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multiple approaches to learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategies that engage students personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individualized learning activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating with students when developing activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Diverse forms of assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individualized forms of assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating with students when developing assessments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### To what extent are your ideas about pedagogy (above) a result of the following experiences ...

*Please select one answer choice in each row.*

	To what extent are your ideas about pedagogy (above) a result of the following experiences ...			
	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Small Extent	Not at All
Pre-service preparation (e.g., courses & student teaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching periodicals (e.g., <i>Journal of Music Education</i> , <i>Teaching Music</i> , or <i>General Music Today</i> , etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversations with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teaching experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal musical engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### In a middle school general music course, how appropriate are the pedagogical strategies of:

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	In a middle school general music course, how appropriate are the pedagogical strategies of:						
	Appropriate	Somewhat Appropriate	Neutral	Somewhat Inappropriate	Inappropriate	I don't know	
Orff Schulwerk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kodaly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dalcroze	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music Learning Theory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interdisciplinary Learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
World Music Pedagogy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Constructivist Pedagogy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal Learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital and Participatory Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### To what extent are your ideas about general music pedagogies (above) a result of the following experiences ...

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	To what extent are your ideas about general music pedagogies (above) a result of the following experiences ...			
	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Small Extent	Not at All
Pre-service preparation (e.g., courses & student teaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching periodicals (e.g., <i>Journal of Music Education</i> , <i>Teaching Music</i> , or <i>General Music Today</i> , etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversations with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teaching experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal musical engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Should general music be a required course in middle school?

Please select one.

- Yes, required for ALL students
- Only required for SOME students
- Not required for ANY student

How confident are you in your understanding of young adolescent (ages 10-15) development?

Please select one option.

- Extremely Confident
- Moderately Confident
- Somewhat Confident
- Not at all Confident

To what extent is your confidence about young adolescent development (above) a result of the following experiences ...

Please select one answer choice in each row.

	To what extent is your confidence about young adolescent development (above) a result of the following experiences ...			
	To a Great Extent	To a Moderate Extent	To a Small Extent	Not at All
Pre-service preparation (e.g., courses & student teaching)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching periodicals (e.g., <i>Journal of Music Education</i> , <i>Teaching Music</i> , or <i>General Music Today</i> , etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conversations with colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your teaching experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your personal musical engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I am aware of *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*, the middle school philosophy statement from the National Middle School Association.

- Yes
- No

**Only those answering “yes” to the previous question received this question**

To what extent are you familiar with the *This We Believe* philosophy statement?

Please select one option.

- To a Great Extent (i.e., this informs my practice regularly)
- To a Moderate Extent
- To a Small Extent (i.e., I remember learning about it at some point)





### I regularly read ...

*For this question, please check **ALL** that apply.*

- Journal of Research in Music Education*
- Music Educators Journal*
- Teaching Music*
- General Music Today*
- I Do Not Regularly Read Music Education Journals/Magazines
- Other

### I see myself as a ...

*Please select one.*

- Band Director
- Orchestral Director
- General Music Teacher
- Choir Director
- Other

### My preferred grade level group to teach is:

*Please select one.*

- Pre-K
- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- Other

How many years have you been teaching music?

My bachelor's degree was a music education degree (BME, BA, BS, BM) leading to teacher certification/licensure.

My current teaching assignment is located in the following geographic region of the United States:

Do you **currently** teach a middle school general music class?

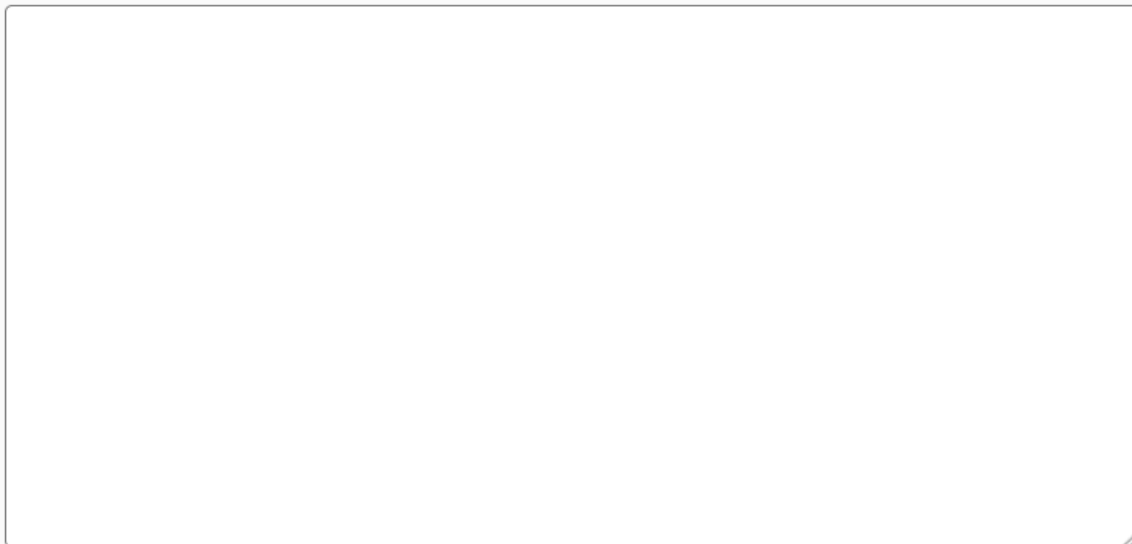
*Please select one.*

- Yes
- No

**Only those answering “yes” to the above question received the next series of questions.**

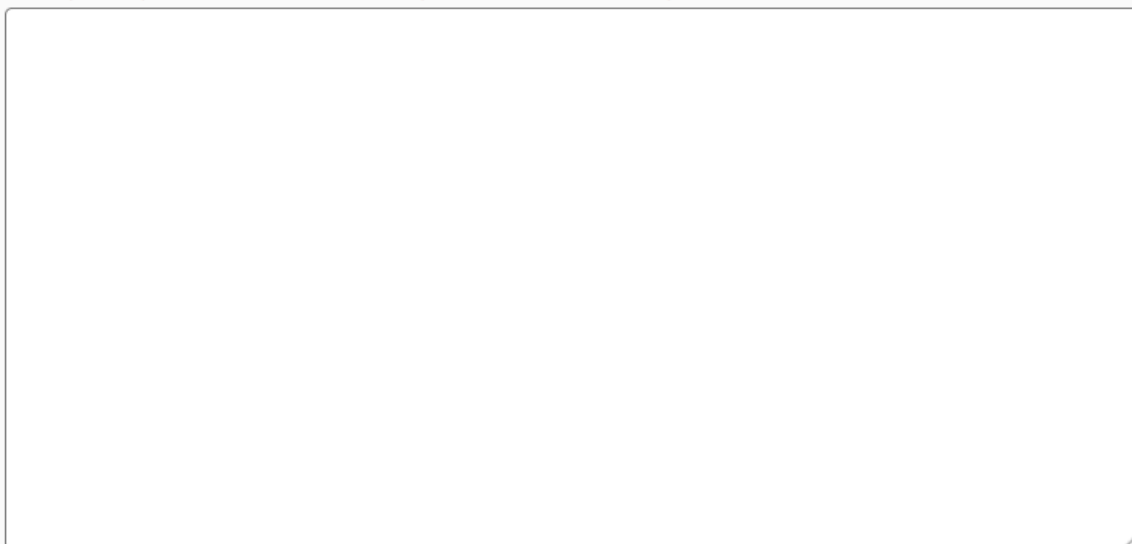
In planning your middle school general music curriculum, where do/did you begin (i.e., with what materials, ideas, beliefs, curricular frameworks, etc.)?

*For this question, please share as much or as little as you like. There is no limit or requirement.*



Please describe a typical class day in your middle school general music course.

*For this question, please share as much or as little as you like. There is no limit or requirement.*



Are you willing to be contacted for participation in follow-up interviews and observations related to this study?

*Please select one.*

- Yes
- No

**Only those answering “yes” to the previous question received this question.**

Please provide your name and a valid e-mail address and/or phone number.

*This information will be kept strictly confidential and will not be associated with your responses on this survey.*

**All respondents received this question.**

Do you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this survey or any question asked?

Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this survey. Your candid feedback is appreciated. Your thoughts and opinions will help to improve middle school music education.

## APPENDIX C: PILOT SURVEY FACTOR ANALYSIS

*Orthogonal Rotation Factor Loadings > 0.55 and Variable Descriptions for 5 Characteristics from TWB**N = 163*

<i>This We Believe Characteristic</i>	<b>Number of Variables</b>	<b>Variable Descriptions</b>	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>Factor 4</b>
Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confidence in Young Adolescent Development</li> <li>Preferred Grade Level: Middle School</li> </ul>				0.7808 0.7784
Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curriculum including using technologies for musical creation</li> <li>Pedagogies involving collaborating with students when developing activities</li> <li>Pedagogies involving individualized learning activities</li> <li>Pedagogies involving student directed music making</li> <li>Pedagogies engaging students personally in musical learning</li> </ul>		0.6681	0.7325	
Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curriculum including the exploration of independent music making</li> <li>Curriculum including students' questions about music</li> <li>Curriculum including challenging musical problems</li> <li>Curriculum including musical careers</li> <li>Curriculum including the musical interests of students</li> <li>Curriculum including connections across the school curriculum</li> <li>Curriculum including the exploration of music creation</li> </ul>		0.7434 0.6238 0.5756 0.6271 0.7271		
Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pedagogies using multiple approaches to teaching</li> <li>Pedagogies using multiple approaches to learning</li> <li>Pedagogies involving independent and small group work</li> </ul>	0.8995 0.9105 0.8190			
Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pedagogies using diverse assessment tools</li> <li>Pedagogies using individualized assessment methods</li> <li>Pedagogies involving collaborating with students on assessments</li> </ul>	0.6466		0.6520 0.8105	

## APPENDIX D: CHANGES TO SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Table D.1

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
Conceptualization, Survey Purpose, & Focus	<p>1) Population: Survey originally designed for all music educators. After preliminary exam, focused on middle level music educators &amp; some adjustments were made.</p> <p>2) Purpose: To investigate music teacher attitudes and beliefs toward the teaching and design of middle school general music</p>	<p>1) Population: Middle school music teachers, but now only want SOME information from those who have never taught a general music course</p> <p>2) Purpose: To investigate the curricular and pedagogical beliefs of middle school music educators as aligned with <i>This We Believe</i></p>	<p>1) Narrowed focus of dissertation</p> <p>2) Desire to focus on <i>This We Believe</i> as overarching concept for dissertation</p> <p>3) The factor analysis of <i>This We Believe</i> variables showed promise and I wanted to investigate this further</p> <p>4) Reading done since prelim helped me think about and narrow my focus</p> <p>5) Only 20% of pilot respondents were familiar with <i>This We Believe</i>, yet they were indicating positive beliefs about items aligned with <i>This We Believe</i>, thus indicating that their curriculum/pedagogy aligns with <i>This We Believe</i> without knowledge of the document.</p>
Research Questions	<p>1) How and to what extent do music teachers prepare, in pre-service courses and student teaching, to teach general music at the middle level?</p> <p>2) How and to what extent is the lived experience of music teachers influenced by the prominent narrative of middle level general music (found in the literature)?</p> <p>3) How and to what extent are middle level general music teachers' beliefs congruent with the principles of a middle level philosophy (as drawn from <i>This We Believe</i>)?</p> <p>4) How do beliefs, attitudes, and preparation influence the design of a middle level general music course curriculum and its pedagogical implementation?</p>	<p>1) How and to what extent are middle level music teachers' beliefs about middle level general music curriculum and pedagogy congruent with the middle level philosophy <i>This We Believe</i>?</p> <p>2) How and to what extent are music teachers' curricular and pedagogical decisions influenced by the following factors in their lived experience: preservice, journals, conversations with colleagues, professional development, teaching experience and personal musical engagement?</p> <p>3) How do philosophical beliefs and lived experience influence the design of a middle level general music course curriculum and its pedagogical implementation?</p>	<p>1) Narrowed my focus as suggested by committee during prelim defense</p> <p>2) Continued reading over the summer helped me to determine that what I want to shape this study is <i>This We Believe</i></p> <p>3) Decided on the focus of <i>This We Believe</i> because it is of importance to me and because the pilot survey indicated:  --- The items factored well into the <i>This We Believe</i> characteristics of curriculum, instruction, and assessment  --- Music teachers are overwhelmingly unaware of <i>This We Believe</i>  --- Music teachers are utilizing beliefs congruent with <i>This We Believe</i> despite not knowing the document (which seems to indicate an interesting research puzzle worthy of unangling)</p>

**Table D.1**

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
Opening Consent Letter	<p>Dear Music Education Colleague, This survey is designed to investigate music educators' beliefs about middle school curriculum and pedagogy. This survey is part of my dissertation research on middle school general music.</p> <p>At present, this is a pilot survey, and I am seeking your feedback in order to make improvements for the national survey. The final question will ask you whether you have any issues or concerns about the survey. Please feel free to answer this honestly so that my research can improve.</p> <p>This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois. By proceeding, you agree to the IRB Consent Letter.</p> <p>If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me or my research director directly. I appreciate your time.</p>	<p>Dear Music Education Colleague, This survey is designed to investigate the principles that guide music educators' decisions about middle school curriculum and pedagogy. As a knowledgeable middle school music educator, your completion of the survey is an important contribution to this study. This survey should take about 15-20 minutes of your time.</p> <p>I am conducting this study as my dissertation research at the University of Illinois. As such, the work has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Illinois. All information that is obtained during this research project will be confidential and kept secure on the University of Illinois secure server. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at <a href="mailto:irb@illinois.edu">irb@illinois.edu</a>.</p> <p>You are also welcome to contact me or my dissertation directly via the e-mail addresses below.</p> <p>Sincerely, Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Candidate <a href="mailto:cronenb2@illinois.edu">cronenb2@illinois.edu</a> Dr. Jeananne Nichols, Research Director <a href="mailto:nicholsj@illinois.edu">nicholsj@illinois.edu</a></p>	<p>1) the data showed that 110 respondents accessed the survey, but did not move beyond the consent page. We determined that this might be because of the "by proceeding, you agree to the IRB consent letter" statement. So we got new language approved by IRB that was less intense.</p> <p>2) Other language was improved to help the opening survey consent letter to appear more professional</p>

Table D.1

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
Demographic Questions	The demographic questions were originally in the pilot survey at the end of the survey in accordance with the recommendations by the survey literature.	Demographic questions were moved to the beginning of the survey	<p>1) The demographic questions are not invasive like some survey demographic questions and thus ease participants into the study rather than alienating them.</p> <p>2) The demographic questions allow for adding survey logic and removing respondents if the next set of questions do not apply to them specifically. With the changes in the population to only MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC TEACHERS, this should allow for a higher response rate and not require those who have never taught middle school general music to take the entire survey.</p> <p>3) This change was intended to boost the overall survey response rate. However, by eliminating some respondents along the way (using logic) the response rate on the major questions may still be limited.</p>
Curriculum question set	<p>I believe the following should be part of a <u>middle school general music curriculum</u> . . .</p> <p>-- Scale: Very true of what I believe . . . Very Untrue</p>	<p>In the middle school general music course(s) you have taught, what was the priority of the following content areas in your curriculum . . .</p> <p>--Scale: Essential . . . Not a priority</p> <p>To what degree did the following influence your curricular choices (above)?</p> <p>--Scale: A great deal . . . Never</p>	<p>Dividing this question into two sections was done for several reasons:</p> <p>1) it better matches the next set of questions about pedagogy</p> <p>2) it separates the "content" from the "why"</p> <p>3) 14 respondents dropped out after this set of questions most likely because of the length</p> <p>4) Pilot survey feedback responses:  ---"Your very 1st question was a bit ambiguous"  ---"The first part was somewhat difficult just because I, and I would think most music teachers, think all of those elements are important. It may be wise to rate in order of importance somehow etc. I felt bad just marking that everything was very important."</p> <p>5) The scales were changed so that teachers could better rank the priority they place on particular</p>



**Table D.1**

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
National Standards Item in curriculum question set	Item: Developing knowledge and skills in all nine National Standards	<p>Item: Developing knowledge and skills in alignment with the National Standards/National Core (1994/2014)</p> <p>Item: Developing knowledge and skills in alignment with state and/or district curriculum standards/guidelines/benchmarks</p>	<p>aspects of content rather than focusing on what they believe</p> <p>1) The June 2014 change to the National Standards</p> <p>2) Pilot survey feedback response: "A small number of questions were based upon the National Standards, which will be changing very soon once the NCCAS Standards are officially adopted on June 4th"</p> <p>3) Our understanding of the focus of many teachers on the district level documents rather than the national ones</p>
Curriculum Question Set Item: Connections	Item: Making connections across the school curriculum	No change (but included in the reasons section not the content section)	<p>In the pilot survey <i>This We Believe</i> factor analysis, this item did not factor. This is likely because an overwhelming percentage of respondents (53%) replied "Very True" on this item while 32% said "somewhat true." Thus the distribution across the scale was not as diverse as other items but rather clumped at one end of the scale. This is good information to have about music educators in general, but provides challenging data to analyze using factor analysis.</p>

Table D.1

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
Pedagogy Items	Scales: Appropriate . . . Inappropriate + I don't know	Scale changed entirely but also eliminated "I don't know" option	<p>1) While the numbers of people selecting "I don't know" as an option were significant in some cases, the option causes some statistical issues. In the pilot analysis, I coded "I don't know" as a zero in the scale. This causes some skewing of the data as "I don't know" doesn't actually fit within the rest of the scale. Since the "I don't know" caused some analysis issues, it was eliminated and new scales/question wording were created in order to eliminate this analysis issue.</p> <p>2) However, it is important to note the pilot data response rates for "I don't know":  Lectures and whole class discussions <math>n=3(1.64)</math>  Whole class music making <math>n=3(1.63)</math>  Independent and small group work <math>n=3(1.63)</math>  Student directed music making <math>n=3(1.64)</math>  Multiple approaches to teaching <math>n=3(1.62)</math>  Multiple approaches to learning <math>n=3(1.62)</math>  Engaging students personally in musical learning <math>n=3(1.63)</math>  Individualized learning activities <math>n=3(1.63)</math>  Collaborating with student when developing activities <math>n=3(1.63)</math>  Diverse assessment tools <math>n=3(1.62)</math>  Individualized assessment methods <math>n=3(1.63)</math>  Collaborating with students on assessments <math>n=4(2.17)</math>  Orff Pedagogies <math>n=25(14.79)</math>  Kodaly Pedagogies <math>n=22(13.10)</math>  Dalcroze Pedagogies <math>n=32(19.28)</math>  Music Learning Theory Pedagogies <math>n=26(15.38)</math>  Interdisciplinary Learning Pedagogies <math>n=15(8.88)</math>  World Music Pedagogies <math>n=16(9.58)</math>  Social Constructivist Pedagogies <math>n=56(33.14)</math>  Informal Learning Pedagogies <math>n=27(15.98)</math>  Digital &amp; Participatory Culture Pedagogies <math>n=30(17.86)</math></p>

Table D.1

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
Curriculum Question Set: 2 items	Item: A FEW aspects of musical knowledge/skills DEEPLY  Item: A WIDE range of musical knowledge/skills BROADLY	Eliminated	1) These items were challenging for respondents early on in the process (during cognitive interviews) and are fairly vague/open to too much interpretation by the survey respondent. 2) While responses in the pilot were distributed rather evenly across the scale, these items did not factor at all in the initial factor analysis of the large item set
Pedagogy Question Set	In a <u>middle school general music course</u> , how developmentally appropriate are: --Scale: appropriate...inappropriate + I don't know  In a middle school general music course, how appropriate are the pedagogical strategies of: --Scale: appropriate . . .inappropriate + I don't know	In the <u>middle school general music course(s)</u> you have taught, how regularly did you use the following teaching/learning strategies? --Scale: Always . . . Never  To what degree did the following formal pedagogies influence your teaching/learning strategies (above)? --Scale: A great deal . . . never	1) This change makes these sets of questions match the formatting of the curriculum question sets -- "what you do" and then "why you do it" 2) The formal general music pedagogies items factored quite well as their own group, but I wasn't certain as to the purpose of including these pedagogies in the survey. Changing them to be reasons why a teacher might use certain pedagogical strategies (mostly taken from <i>This We Believe</i> ) helps to understand where these pedagogical strategies are coming from in music education (since they aren't coming from <i>This We Believe</i> knowledge - at least so we think based on the pilot) 3) Again, the change in the scale allows teachers to rank based on their own experiences rather than speak abstractly about their beliefs -- these language changes hopefully connect better to teacher's actual classroom practice -- one of the research questions.
Demographics: current teaching position	Options: Band, Choir, General Music, Orchestra, spaces for additional	Options: Band (concert, marching, jazz, etc.) Choir (concert, show, jazz, madrigal, etc.) General Music, Orchestra, spaces for additional	Many pilot respondents placed marching band, show choirs, or any form of jazz music in the "other" category rather than including it within the primary music discipline. Yet, it is impossible to know if other respondents included these musical forms within the standard band, choir, orchestra categories. The additional parenthesis help

**Table D.1**

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
Demographics: entire career	During the course of my ENTIRE career, I have taught the following . . .	Is your CURRENT (2014-2015) teaching assignment consistent with the positions you have held in the past?	<p>respondents to know what should be included in the broad category and hopefully will avoid the large number of "other" entries that occurred during the pilot.</p> <p>Pilot data revealed that the question on the pilot encompassed current position rather than focusing only on prior years. In addition, the number of "other" entries respondents selected was overwhelming for data cleaning. The logically displayed response box allows respondents to fill in any other details that might be relevant if they have changed grade levels or subject areas over the course of their career.</p>
Requiring General Music	Should general music be a required course in middle school?	Added Sub Question: Would you like share your reason for your answer choice above?	<p>Pilot Feedback indicated respondents desired to explain themselves on this question.</p> <p>---"One question asked if all students should be required to take general music. I chose, no. Not all. The reason for this is simple. Since many districts are requiring students to take a music class and rehearsal time is being reduced, students in band, orchestra and choir should have the option to not be in general music, but receive either another elective or concentrated time on their instrument. This is not to be elitist, simply practical."</p> <p>--- "I felt like many of the questions I answered I wanted to provide an explanation for. I did not feel the answers to the questions were as cut and dry as the survey made them out to be."</p>
Young Adolescents	How confident are you in your understanding of young adolescent (ages 10-15) development?	The following are characteristics of young adolescent (ages 10-15) development. How confident are you in your knowledge of these <u>characteristics</u> below?	<p>More specifics regarding young adolescent development help to determine whether teachers are familiar with one or the many aspects of young adolescent development.</p>

**Table D.1**

<b>Portion of Pilot Survey</b>	<b>Pilot Survey Language/Details</b>	<b>Change Made for National Survey</b>	<b>Reason(s) for Change</b>
Open-ended Question 1	In planning your middle school general music curriculum, where do/did you begin (i.e., with what materials, ideas, beliefs, curricular frameworks, etc.)?	What do you use to guide your middle school general music course planning process (i.e., what materials, ideas, beliefs, curricular frameworks, etc.)?	This revised language, while quite similar to the pilot, made the question clearer and more focused.  This question resulted in a variety of answers on the pilot: some interpreted it to mean how many periods in a day did they teach, others interpreted it as describing their general music period layout (warm-up, instruction, practice), others copied and pasted lesson plans from the day they took the survey, and still others said that there was no such thing as a “typical day” in general music. A few respondents left the question blank or said that they didn't understand the question. Clearly, the question was interpretable in too many different ways. Thus it has been changed to better reflect the research questions. This new question focuses specifically on research question 2 and allows teachers to use their own language to describe their personal experiences.
Open-ended Question 2	Please describe a typical class day in your middle school general music course.	In planning your middle school general music curriculum, what aspects of your prior experience most influence you?	This question resulted in a variety of answers on the pilot: some interpreted it to mean how many periods in a day did they teach, others interpreted it as describing their general music period layout (warm-up, instruction, practice), others copied and pasted lesson plans from the day they took the survey, and still others said that there was no such thing as a “typical day” in general music. A few respondents left the question blank or said that they didn't understand the question. Clearly, the question was interpretable in too many different ways. Thus it has been changed to better reflect the research questions. This new question focuses specifically on research question 2 and allows teachers to use their own language to describe their personal experiences.
Pilot Feedback	Do you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this survey or any question asked?	Removed	Not necessary for national survey as question sought feedback from pilot survey takers in order to improve the survey instrument.

**Table D.1**

Portion of Pilot Survey	Pilot Survey Language/Details	Change Made for National Survey	Reason(s) for Change
Journal Reading	I regularly read . . .	Removed	<p>Data provided by responses to this question is no longer relevant to the survey focus.</p> <p>In addition, the data collected was unsurprising: Respondents were asked which, if any of the music education journals they read regularly. Forty-nine respondents (28.82%) claimed they do not read any music education journals regularly. Of those who do read regularly, 101(59.41%) read Music Educators Journal, and 76(44.71%) read Teaching Music. Seventy of the 76 respondents who read Teaching Music also read Music Educators Journal. Less than 20% of respondents read Research in Music Education and less than 6% read General Music Today. Approximately 25% of respondents read some other journal. These responses included music discipline specific resources such as The Instrumentalist, The Strad, Choral Director, or Strings, specific music pedagogies such as Orff Echo or American Suzuki Journal, non-music journals such as Education Leadership, and a new media resource “The Band Directors Facebook.” If it can be assumed that music teachers’ classroom practices are influenced by the journals they regularly read, this sample of Illinois music educators is most heavily influenced by Music Educators Journal and Teaching Music which regularly feature articles and tips targeted to middle level general music (not surprising since the survey was sent to members of the Illinois NAFME affiliate and these two journals are part of membership). However, nearly 30% of middle level music educators responding to this survey do not read journals regularly, thus their curricular and pedagogical beliefs about middle level general music must be influenced by other factors.</p>

**Table D.1**

<b>Portion of Pilot Survey</b>	<b>Pilot Survey Language/Details</b>	<b>Change Made for National Survey</b>	<b>Reason(s) for Change</b>
Survey Logic to Skip Questions for Some Respondents	Only at the end for those currently teaching middle school general music (they were the only respondents asked to answer the open-ended questions).	1) Logic from the pilot remains 2) Added additional logic after main demographic questions ----At any point in your career, have you taught a middle school general music course? Those who say "no" will be shot to the end of the survey	Additional survey logic designed to increase total survey response rate, but to keep those who have NEVER taught MSGM from answering the curriculum and pedagogy questions. While this will hopefully boost the overall survey response rate, it may not raise the response rate for the content rich sets of questions.

## APPENDIX E: SURVEY EMAIL INVITATION SENT BY NAFME

Dear Music Educator,

I invite you to participate in a survey investigating middle school curriculum and pedagogy. You have been selected to participate in this survey because your registration with NAFME indicates that you are a middle school music educator.

I am conducting this study as part of my dissertation research at the University of Illinois. I am interested in understanding how practicing middle school music teachers make decisions about general music curriculum and pedagogy. The results of this survey will help the field to better understand how practicing music teachers think about middle school general music and consequently help to improve the preservice preparation of future music educators.

Your experience teaching middle level students is valuable. Please consider contributing your expertise to this study. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete and you can access it by clicking here: <http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1764748/Middle-School-General-Music-National>

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign  
[Cronenb2@illinois.edu](mailto:Cronenb2@illinois.edu)



## APPENDIX F: SURVEY EMAIL REMINDER SENT BY NAFME

Dear Music Educator,

Recently you received an invitation to participate in a survey investigating middle school curriculum and pedagogy. You have been selected to participate in this survey because your registration with NAFME indicates that you are a middle school music educator.

If you have already completed the survey, thank you so much for your time!

If you have not yet participated, please consider contributing your expertise to this research study. Your experience teaching middle level students is valuable. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes to complete and you can access it by clicking here:

**<http://www.surveymoz.com/s3/1764748/Middle-School-General-Music-National>**

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg  
Doctoral Candidate, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign,  
Cronenb2@illinois.edu

## APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of Vice Chancellor for Research  
Institutional Review Board  
528 East Green Street  
Suite 203  
Champaign, IL 61820



February 18, 2014

Jeananne Nichols  
Music  
308 Music Ed Annex  
909 W Oregon St  
M/C 056

RE: *A Mixed Methods Investigation of Middle School General Music in the United States*  
IRB Protocol Number: 14524

**EXPIRATION DATE: 02/17/2017**

Dear Dr. Nichols:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled *A Mixed Methods Investigation of Middle School General Music in the United States*. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 14524 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR.46.101(b)(1).

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me or the IRB Office, or visit our website at <http://www.irb.illinois.edu>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Rebecca Van Tine".

Rebecca Van Tine, MS  
Assistant Human Subjects Research Specialist, Institutional Review Board

c: Stephanie Cronenberg

## APPENDIX H: SURVEY CONSENT LETTER

September 1, 2014

Dear Music Educator,

As a fellow member of NAFME, I invite you to take part in this research survey focused on secondary music education in the United States. I am a practicing music teacher and a doctoral student at the University of Illinois. For my dissertation, I am investigating how middle school music teachers make decisions about their general music curriculum and pedagogy. I invite you to participate in this short survey focused on your personal opinions and teaching experience. This survey should take about 20 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this survey will be kept confidential. The survey will ask for some basic demographic information such as the region of the country in which you work, but will not require you to share your name or contact information. Once survey responses are received, all respondents will be given an anonymous code in order to protect your confidentiality.

This survey is the first phase in a multi-phase study. Should you be willing to be contacted for follow-up phases of this study, please enter your name and e-mail address at the end of this survey. This information will be kept in the strictest of confidence and separate from all other data.

We do not anticipate any risk greater than normal life. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Any participant may stop taking part at any time. There is no circumstance under which your contributions will be removed from the project involuntarily.

All information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly secure on the University of Illinois secure server. The results of this study will be used for a Ph.D. dissertation, and potentially a journal article and conference presentation.

By continuing to the survey, you indicate your agreement with the above and consent to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Student  
[Cronenb2@illinois.edu](mailto:Cronenb2@illinois.edu)

Jeananne Nichols, Assistant Professor  
[nicholsj@illinois.edu](mailto:nicholsj@illinois.edu)

## APPENDIX I: PILOT SURVEY CONSENT LETTER

March 30, 2014

Dear Illinois Music Educator,

As a fellow member of Illinois Music Education Association, I invite you to take part in this research survey focused on secondary music education in the United States. I am a practicing music teacher and a doctoral student at the University of Illinois. For my dissertation, I am investigating the attitudes and beliefs of practicing music teachers and their pre-service preparation for middle school general music teaching. Students in middle school are influenced by their elementary music program and their study in middle school will influence their feeder high school program. Consequently, it is important that music teachers at all levels participate in this study. This study is intended to help improve secondary pre-service music education. I invite you to participate in this short survey focused on your personal opinions, teaching experience and your personal pre-service preparation. This survey should take about 20 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this survey will be kept confidential. The survey will ask for some basic demographic information such as the region of the country in which you work, but will not require you to share your name or contact information. Once survey responses are received, all respondents will be given an anonymous code in order to protect your confidentiality.

This survey is the first phase in a multi-phase study. Should you be willing to be contacted for follow-up phases of this study, please enter your name and e-mail address at the end of this survey. This information will be kept in the strictest of confidence and separate from all other data.

We do not anticipate any risk greater than normal life. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Any participant may stop taking part at any time. There is no circumstance under which your contributions will be removed from the project involuntarily.

All information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly secure on the University of Illinois secure server. The results of this study will be used for a Ph.D. dissertation, and potentially a journal article and conference presentation.

By continuing to the survey, you indicate your agreement with the above and consent to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Student  
[Cronenb2@illinois.edu](mailto:Cronenb2@illinois.edu)

Jeananne Nichols, Assistant Professor  
[nicholsj@illinois.edu](mailto:nicholsj@illinois.edu)

## APPENDIX J: NARRATIVE SELECTION ONE PAGE EXAMPLE

Willing Narrative Participant  
Respondent #41

<b>Bachelor's Degree Leading to Certification</b>	<b>Number of Years Teaching</b>	<b>Geographical Region of US</b>	<b>Preferred Grade to Teach</b>	<b>See-Self</b>	<b>Current Position (1=MS Only)</b>
Yes	5	Northeast	Middle School	Band Director	0

**General Music Required:** Yes, required for ALL students

- **Reasoning:** My school is a 6-12 school. I aim my general music curriculum to prepare my students for high school ensembles.

**Aware of *TWB*:** Yes

- **How Aware:**

**What do you use to guide your middle school general music course planning process (i.e., what materials, ideas, beliefs, curricular frameworks, etc.)?**

I plan the entire year in the summer. I have grades 6 and 7 every day for half of the year. I plan by attending my local and national NafME professional development meetings, but mostly from working with colleagues. I do mostly big-block units, such as ukulele, guitar, recorder, piano, African drumming, and technology in music. I use the Hal Leonard book for ukulele methods, and compile most from websites, the Music Express magazines, and a few curriculum books.

**In planning your middle school general music curriculum, what aspects of your prior experience most influence you?**

I learned most of curriculum planning from my student teaching. I work for an orphanage in Tanzania in the summer, which I love to pull in to the classroom when I can.

## APPENDIX K: NARRATIVE PARTICIPANT SELECTION RUBRIC

*Is this teacher providing helpful data for my research questions?*

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>TWB Familiarity</b>		No		Yes	
<b>1: Value Young Adolescents &amp; Prepared to Teach*</b>			Mentions preparation or not for teaching middle school teaching		Response content appears to value young adolescents
<b>2: Active, purposeful learning</b>	No reference to principle in response	Little reference to principle in response	Vague reference to principle in response	Some, but not detailed reference to principle in response	Clear reference to principle in response
<b>3: Challenging, exploratory, integrative and/or relevant</b>	No reference to principle in response		Vaguely mentions OR indirectly references at least one of these concepts	Some reference to at least one of these concepts with some details/support	Clear reference to two or more of these concepts in response
<b>4: Multiple learning and teaching approaches</b>	No reference to principle in response/ References only one form of musical learning		Vague reference to two or more forms of musical learning in response		Clear reference to two or more forms of musical learning in response
<b>5: Varied Assessments</b>	No mention of assessments in response		Mentions assessing, but does not discuss multiple kinds		Clearly references two or more forms of assessment
<b>Young Adolescents (developmental or other needs)</b>	No reference to the students needs/desires	Little reference to student needs/ young adolescents	Vague reference to young adolescent needs/desires	Clear reference to young adolescent needs/desires	Teacher specifies beginning curriculum with student needs/desires in planning
<b>Parts of experience impact curriculum*</b>	Conferences OR Journals OR Standards	Preservice (including student teaching)	Personal musical abilities/ Engagement OR Collaboration with Colleagues	Professional development (in school, masters, etc.) OR Teaching Experience	Teaching experience with direct reference to students
<b>Music Content Being Taught</b>	No content provided	Lists but does not describe	Described vaguely OR describes one lesson/unit not whole course	Some description with some compelling content	Described clearly and in detail (a clear story/passion)
<b>Disconfirming Evidence</b>			Square peg in a round hole – provides congruencies/ incongruences info genuine to context		
<b>Compelling</b>	☹☹	☹	☺	☺	☺☺

\* = Can circle more than one option.

## APPENDIX L: NARRATIVE PARTICIPANT INVITATION EMAIL

Dear [NAME],

Thank you so much for completing the online survey about your teaching in middle school general music at the end of October. Over 1,400 music teachers took part in this survey. When you completed the survey, you, along with 208 other music teachers, indicated a willingness to be contacted for follow-up interviews. Your answers stood out. I am particularly intrigued by [FILL IN WITH CONTENT]. I am very interested to speak with you further about your teaching, your students, and your school community. I believe that you have valuable information to share about middle school general music and I hope we can make plans to talk.

Would you be willing to Skype, Facetime, or even just speak on the phone sometime in the next few weeks? Perhaps just after the holidays before things get busy at school? It will only take about 30 minutes and I will be asking you questions about your fall semester, your school's music program, and your preservice preparation. If this sounds like something you could fit in, is there a time or day that would be best for you?

Because I am completing this research for my doctoral dissertation, I have a university consent form I will send you. It explains my project and your rights as a volunteer. The most important aspect is that your identity and other details, such as information about your students and school, are confidential. Before I can use what I have learned from our conversations, I am required to have your signed permission. A scanned copy of the letter with your signature is all that is necessary. There may also be requirements that your district/school has for me to complete and I am more than willing to do so.

Once again, thank you so much for your thoughtful and thorough attention to my survey. I hope we can work out a time so that I can hear more. With it being the holiday break, I completely understand if you do not want to spend part of it talking about school! Thank you in advance for considering my invitation and I wish you a relaxing winter break.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie Cronenberg

## APPENDIX M: SCREENING INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### **Introduction:**

- General ice-breaking
  - Hi, etc. Are you still on winter break?/When do you start back?
  - Where are you geographically? How close is your school to your home?
- Introduce Me
- Re Study
  - Dissertation study
  - Screening interview determine final teachers to observe
  - Week-long visits to classrooms
- Recording
  - I'll be recording this today. You can ask me to talk off the record and I will stop the recording
  - You'll be given transcript to review.
- Questions?

### **Questions:**

- Personal history
  - Where did you go to undergrad and what was your primary instrument/focus?
  - Have you completed additional degrees?
  - When you completed your undergraduate degree, what did you hope you would teach?
  - What did you feel your undergrad was preparing you best to teach?
  - When did you start teaching middle school general music?
- Tell me about your school community and your student population.
- How long have you been at the school?
- Tell me a little bit about your school day/week.
- What guides your content choices for your general music course?
  - What will you be working on, in general music, when school starts back?
  - What was the most successful thing you did in general music this past semester?
- What is the structure of your general music class?
  - Number of weeks.
  - Grade levels.
  - Wheel? Required?
  - How many periods of general music?
- What were you working on when the fall semester ended?
- Tell me about one interesting thing that occurred during the fall semester (curriculum, a particular student, etc.)
- What will you be working on when the spring semester begins?
- Describe how you like to be with your students.
- What do you believe most strongly about teaching & music education?
- If you could give current pre-service music teachers any advice, what would you tell them?
- Is there anything you would like to talk about that I haven't asked you?



## APPENDIX N: NARRATIVE SITE VISIT PROTOCOL

### **Flexible Focus for each Day:**

1. Day 1: Place
  - a. Observe and take notes on school and classroom environment, photos of classroom
  - b. Begin forming a description of teacher in the classroom
  - c. Record weekly schedule and confirm any details regarding general music course structure
  - d. After observations: begin to create a short description of learning environment and the teacher in this place; write personal reflection
2. Day 2: Curriculum and Pedagogy
  - a. Focus on how general music is being taught by this teacher
  - b. Ask to review curricular documents – scan documents as available
  - c. Discuss/clarify responses to survey items as needed
  - d. After observations: begin to create a description of the teacher and his/her approach to general music; write personal reflection
3. Day 3: Young Adolescents
  - a. Focus on how the teacher interacts with/engages/treats young adolescents
  - b. Discuss with the teacher his/her experiences with and preparation for working with young adolescents
  - c. Focus on how the school/classroom creates an appropriate environment for young adolescents
  - d. After observations: describe the learning environment through the eyes of a young adolescent; write personal reflection
4. Day 4: Influences/Tensions
  - a. Focus on what environmental or lived experience factors are influencing this teachers' approach to middle school general music
  - b. Focus on an tensions that have appeared throughout the week and discuss (if possible) with the teacher
  - c. Make note of interactions between teacher and colleagues/administration.
  - d. After observations: describe the influences and tensions through the eyes of this teacher; write personal reflection
5. Day 5: Open
  - a. Focus on tensions or on specific details unclear
  - b. What other locations within the school has the teacher spent time during this week/with which adults has he/she interacted?
  - c. After observations: describe what is most compelling about this particular setting and write new description of teacher in time and space (forward, backward, inward, and outward); write personal reflection

**Questions for Students:**

- What is your favorite part about music class?
- What do you like best about your music teacher?
- What would you change about this class?

**Questions for Colleagues:**

- How have you worked with \_\_\_\_\_ in the past?
- What is collaboration amongst teachers like at this school?
- What big ideas guide this school as a learning community?
- What impressions do you have from students regarding the music program?

**Questions for Administration:**

- What beliefs guide you as an administrator?
  - How do you distinguish between the middle level learners vs. other groupings at this school?
  - OR: What benefits do you see in a K-8 learning environment?
- How do you communicate to teachers ideas about middle level learning?
- What do you think is most important about a learning environment for students ages 10-15?
- What programs do you have in place that are specifically designed for young adolescents?
- How would you describe a successful teacher at this school?
- What visions do you have for this school community?
- What role do you feel music plays in this school community?

**Questions for Specific Teacher:**

TWB Characteristic	Details	Evidence/Notes	Comments
Educators value young adolescents and are prepared to teach them	Teacher preparation to work with young adolescents		
	Inclusive, democratic, and team-oriented approaches		
	Sensitivity to changing needs of middle school students		
Students and teachers are engaged in active, purposeful learning	Active music making/active discussions regarding music		
	Musical learning has purpose that students appear to understand		
	Students appear to be engaged personally		
	Hands-Joined – Collaboration between teacher and students		
Curriculum is challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant	Challenging – pushes students to engage with music more deeply; advanced concepts and skills		
	Exploratory – allows students to figure out musical problems alone or to try out new music – attitude toward exploration of music		
	Integrative – working across the curriculum; questions students ask		
	Relevant – connects with students' lives within and outside school; questions students ask		
Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches	Class involves more than one type of musical learning		
	Pedagogies are multiple: inquiry, group work, hands-on, etc.		
	Teacher utilizes variety of resources to help all students understand content; multiple intelligences		
Varied and ongoing assessments advance learning as well as measure it	Assessment, Evaluation and Feedback		
	Individual Successes; Formative Feedback		
	Student Self-Assessment		

Lived Experience	Details	Evidence/Notes	Comments
Preservice Experience	General Music		
Journals/Publications			
Work with Colleagues			
Teaching Experience			
Personal Musical Engagement			
Preservice Experience	Young Adolescents		
Journals/Publications			
Work with Colleagues			
Teaching Experience			
Personal Musical Engagement			

## APPENDIX O: PARENT NOTIFICATION LETTER

**Narratives of Experience Letter to Parents**

September 20, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians:

My name is Stephanie Cronenberg, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois. Your child's music teacher, **[teacher name]** is currently a participant in my dissertation research.

I am writing to introduce myself and inform you that as part of my research project **[teacher's name]** has given me permission to observe **her/him** teaching on **[date]**. My research is investigating middle school music teachers who teach general music classes and I will be observing **[teacher's name]** entire school day, both general music and ensemble courses. As a researcher, I will be present in your son/daughter's classroom, but my focus will be on the teacher, not your student. Students are not the focus of my study and while I might describe teacher interactions with students in my study, no student will be identified or described in any way. During my observation I will sit in the back of the room and take notes on the lesson that occurs that day. Please be assured that my focus is on **[teacher's name]** as I hope to capture **her/his** experience teaching middle school.

We do not anticipate any risk greater than normal life. My observation day will be much like any other day in your student's music classroom except there will be an additional adult observing quietly in the back of the room. All information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly secure on the University of Illinois secure server. In my research study **[teacher's name]** will be given a pseudonym as will the school. This is to protect the confidentiality of each participating teacher.

**[Teacher's name]** will ensure that all school and district policies are followed during this day of observation. If you have any questions or concerns, please use the space at the bottom of this letter to write a note to **[teacher's name]**.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Student  
[Cronenb2@illinois.edu](mailto:Cronenb2@illinois.edu)

Jeananne Nichols, Assistant Professor  
[nicholsj@illinois.edu](mailto:nicholsj@illinois.edu)

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## APPENDIX P: NARRATIVE SCREENING INTERVIEW CONSENT LETTER

December 18, 2014

Dear X:

I am a doctoral student from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois. As you may recall, in October of 2014, you completed a survey asking for your opinions and experiences with middle school general music. At that time, you indicated your willingness to participate in follow-up interviews and classroom observations. At this time, I would like to ask you to serve as a participant in the interview portion of my research study.

If you choose to participate in this project, we will begin with a thirty-minute interview session (in-person or electronic communication) discussing your general music class and your pre-service training. This interview will be audio recorded for research purposes. After the interview, the audio recording will be transcribed. You will then be asked if you would like to review the transcript of the interview and make changes.

We do not anticipate any risk greater than normal life. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Any participant may stop taking part at any time. There is no circumstance under which your contributions will be removed from the project involuntarily. You will be given a pseudonym in order to protect your anonymity. In addition, your school name and the geographic location will be changed. This helps to protect your confidentiality.

All information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly secure on the University of Illinois secure server. The results of this study will be used for a Ph.D. dissertation, and potentially a journal article and conference presentation.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please your willingness to participate in this project. **Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.** If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me by e-mail.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Student  
[Cronenb2@illinois.edu](mailto:Cronenb2@illinois.edu)

Jeananne Nichols, Assistant Professor  
[nicholsj@illinois.edu](mailto:nicholsj@illinois.edu)

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I agree to be interview participant for the research project as described above.

Yes, I agree to be audio taped for research purposes during each of the interviews.

Signature

Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu)

## APPENDIX Q: NARRATIVE SITE VISIT CONSENT LETTER

February 22, 2015

Dear X:

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois. As you may recall, in October of 2014, you completed a survey asking for your opinions and experiences with middle school general music. Based on our recent interview session, you indicated a willingness to have me visit your classroom. At this time, I would like to ask you to serve as a participant in the narrative portion of my research study.

If you choose to participate in this project, I will visit your classroom for a week (**X**) in order to observe in your classroom and experience your weekly teaching. During the classroom observations, you will not be asked to prepare special lessons, but rather teach as you do normally. Our informal conversations during my visit may also be used as additional data for my research. In addition, I may ask to review any curriculum documents and resources you have available for your general music course. Following my week-long visit, I may request a follow-up, recorded interview to clarify any issues that arise during my observation. You will be given the opportunity to review and make changes to the narrative I write based on my visit and our interviews.

We do not anticipate any risk greater than normal life. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. Any participant may stop taking part at any time. There is no circumstance under which your contributions will be removed from the project involuntarily. You will be given a pseudonym in order to protect your anonymity. In addition, your school name and the geographic location will be changed. This helps to protect your confidentiality.

All information that is obtained during this research project will be kept strictly secure on the University of Illinois secure server. The results of this study will be used for a Ph.D. dissertation, and potentially a journal article and conference presentation.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate your willingness to participate in this project. **Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.** If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me by e-mail.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Cronenberg, Doctoral Student  
[Cronenb2@illinois.edu](mailto:Cronenb2@illinois.edu)

Jeananne Nichols, Assistant Professor  
[nicholsj@illinois.edu](mailto:nicholsj@illinois.edu)

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I agree to be a narrative participant for the research project as described above.

Yes, I agree to be audio taped for research purposes during each of the interviews.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at [irb@illinois.edu](mailto:irb@illinois.edu)

## APPENDIX R: LIVED EXPERIENCE COMPOSITE VARIABLES

*Lived Experience Composite Variables and Response Percentages on a Continuous Scale*

Composite Variable	Descriptive Statistics			12-point Continuous Scale											
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Preservice Preparation	683	8.05	2.44	0.00	0.00	4.39	5.56	6.15	10.54	12.45	15.96	15.23	11.42	9.96	8.35
Professional Periodicals	677	6.62	2.12	0.00	0.00	9.01	7.24	13.59	20.97	15.21	13.59	11.82	5.02	1.77	1.77
Conversations with Colleagues	677	9.42	1.90	0.00	0.00	0.30	0.74	1.03	5.61	9.31	12.11	20.38	19.05	14.03	17.43
Professional Development	675	8.87	2.19	0.00	0.00	1.78	2.07	4.15	7.11	9.04	15.70	19.70	14.07	13.48	12.89
Teaching Experience	683	11.11	1.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.29	1.17	2.64	8.78	11.86	19.18	55.78
Musical Engagement	678	9.96	1.85	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.44	2.21	2.21	4.28	10.47	16.96	17.55	19.47	26.11