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# Integrated Music Education Perspectives and Practices of Middle School Music, English, and Science Teachers

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# Integrated Music Education Perspectives and Practices of Middle School Music, English, and Science Teachers

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate Integrated Music Education (IME) as a pedagogical approach to address both music and non-music learning. We explored middle-school music and non-music teachers' perceptions of IME and observed their instructional practices. Our corresponding research questions were: (a) what were participants' perceptions of IME; and (b) how did participants' observed instructional practices demonstrate IME quality (i.e. disciplinary and interdisciplinary instruction)? Using a case study design, we recruited a purposeful sample of three teacher-participants: one music teacher and two of their non-music teacher colleagues. We collected interview and observation data. To rate the level of observed integrated instruction, we used a protocol adapted from existing models. Using inductive and deductive analysis, four themes emerged from the interview data: defining IME, benefits of IME, obstacles to IME, and supports for IME. We identified a disconnect between teachers' perceptions and practices. In general, our interviews indicated higher-level IME perceptions while the observational ratings revealed lower-level practices. Implications of this study include the importance of defining

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IME, bridging the gap between perceptions and practices, and developing effective PD to foster effective IME instruction.

*Keywords:* middle school education, music education, music integration, arts integration

## Introduction

Authentic interdisciplinary arts education, also frequently labeled integrated arts instruction, typically involves multi-modal and interactive learning activities and collaboration among teachers or specialists (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2015). As one of the most commonly offered arts subjects in American public schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012; O'Keefe et al., 2016), music is well situated for efficiently delivering integrated arts curricula. Accordingly, Integrated Music Education (IME) offers interdisciplinary ways to foster critical and creative thinking skills, to promote abstract reasoning, and to involve students with multi-sensory and multi-modal activities in academic learning (Barrett et al., 1997; Fowler, 2001; Harney, 2020: LaGarry & Richard, 2018; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).

Ideas and strategies for designing and delivering interdisciplinary curricula that integrate arts and non-arts subjects have existed for decades. Innovative educators have emphasized conceptual and practical integration between arts and non-arts subjects, addressing standards in multiple disciplines (Barrett, et al., 1997; Bresler, 1995; Burnaford, et al., 2013; Cslovjecsek & Zulauf, 2018). Such instruction is more common at the elementary level (Battersby & Cave, 2014) but has promise for middle-school learners based on their responsiveness to interdisciplinary teams (Boyer & Bishop, 2004). Recognizing this and other developmental differences of the middle-school learner, we undertook this study as the next step in our research agenda to investigate middle-school teachers' interdisciplinary perceptions and practices (Johnson et al., 2021).

The Connecting process strand of the National Core Arts Standards [NCAS] (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2015) advances IME pedagogy by explicitly promoting standards-based instruction between music and other disciplines. The National Association for

Music Education, however, emphasizes the other three NCAS artistic processes of Creating, Performing, and Responding, by embedding Connecting within them (Shuler et al., 2014). This deemphasis on the Connecting process is unfortunate because educators using integrated arts curricula have documented enhanced student engagement, achievement, attitudes, attendance, and behavior (Noblit et al., 2000; Noblit et al., 2009). Through connecting, both students and teachers develop an understanding of the relationships, contexts, and connections among various disciplines while utilizing practical applications for linking music with other subjects in meaningful ways.

Among the models that describe integrated arts education, Bresler's (1995) influential categorization defines four different levels of integration: subservient, affective, social, and co-equal. The first level, subservient integration is characterized by superficial, trivial connections, typically involving the arts serving another discipline (e.g., memorizing song lyrics to help remember a set of facts). Affective integration is exemplified by the use of music to influence the classroom atmosphere or affect mood (e.g., playing background music to help students relax or concentrate, or drawing while listening to music). When music is used to facilitate student routines, manage classroom behaviors, or elevate community functions, social integration occurs. Finally, in co-equal integration, skills and understandings in arts and non-arts disciplines are equally valued and emphasized (e.g., exploring the concept of contrast in music and literature).

Bresler's (1995) characterization of the co-equal style of arts integration places music as an "equal partner, integrating the curriculum with arts-specific content, skills, expressions, and modes of thinking" (Bresler, 1995, p. 33). Other labels for this style of integration appear in previous literature with different descriptors, such as "concept-based arts integration" (Wolkowicz, 2017, p. 42), "conceptual connections" (Wiggins, 2001, p. 42), "two-way

integration" (Barry, 2008, p. 33), "syntegration" (Russell-Bowie, 2009, p. 1), and "integrity between the disciplines" (Barrett et al., 1997, p. 35). Similarly, Burnaford, Aprill, and Weiss (2013) describe an "elegant fit" (p. 23) between disciplines, highlighting the importance of arts integrated lessons in which arts and non-arts content and objectives are addressed. While researchers differ in their specific labeling of arts integration approaches or styles, they agree that arts integration activities associated with Bresler's co-equal style occur infrequently in schools, and that instructional practices aligning with Bresler's subservient level are the most common (Bresler, 2002; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Wiggins, 2001).

Both music and non-music teachers commonly face multiple challenges that inhibit their ability to create and deliver successful IME lessons. Those challenges include lack of sufficient instructional training in music integration, effective collaboration, administrator support, and planning time (Battersby & Cave, 2014; Cosenza, 2005; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; May & Robinson, 2016; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Wolkowicz, 2017). More generally, for teachers across the arts who often have expectations to present public performances and outreach events (Hallmark, 2012), planning time is regularly a limiting factor. Other researchers have reported the importance of collaborative efforts between arts specialists and their non-arts teacher colleagues (Bresler, 2002; Della Pietra, 2010; Munroe, 2015; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Strand, 2006) and of effective professional development for arts integration (Burnaford et al., 2013; Krakaur, 2017; LaGarry & Richard, 2018). Consequently, previous scholars have reported that although some teachers have used an integrated music approach, this pedagogical strategy is frequently limited and sometimes of low quality (Abril & Gault, 2006; Bresler, 2002; Giles & Frego, 2004; Hallmark, 2012; NCES, 2012; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Saunders & Baker, 1991). With respect to integrating music with other subject areas, non-music teachers generally hold positive attitudes

about music (Giles & Frego, 2004), but do not take responsibility for teaching musical concepts (Johnson et al, 2021; O'Keefe et al., 2016).

On balance, the benefits of IME instruction are many and varied. Academic and social outcomes are the chief among these for students (Catterall, et al., 2012; Goff & Ludwig, 2013; May & Robinson, 2016). Generally, for teachers, the primary advantages are enhancing classroom learning environments (Cosenza, 2005; Deasy, 2008; Irwin, et al., 2006; Montemer, 2020; Vaughan, 2008). Specifically for arts teachers, Hallmark (2012) advocated for high-quality and integrated arts education as a way to combat isolated and disconnected instruction. Considering both students and teachers, other scholars have identified additional rationales for arts integration including supporting student academic achievement (Burton et al., 2000; Moss et al., 2018), fostering student creativity (Baer & Kaufman, 2012; Deasy, 2008; Root-Bernstein, 2001), promoting student engagement (Mark et al., 2021), and facilitating active participation in collaborative curricular planning (Barrett et al., 1997; Bresler, 2002; LaGarry & Richard, 2018; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Strand, 2006).

Previously, we examined IME at the elementary level and found a disconnect between teachers' perceptions of IME and their actual practices (Johnson et al., 2021). More specifically, elementary music and non-music teachers demonstrated less robust levels of music integration than they described. Because schools with vibrant arts programs have more student involvement, engagement, and higher graduation rates at the secondary level (Johnson & Howell, 2009), we have elaborated on our previous study to examine IME at the middle school level. More specifically, the purpose of our study was to explore middle school music, science, and language arts teachers' perceptions of IME and to observe their instructional practices. Our corresponding research questions were: (a) what were participants' perceptions of IME; and (b) how did

participants' observed instructional practices demonstrate IME quality (i.e. disciplinary and interdisciplinary instruction)?

## Methodology

We chose a case study design for this investigation because that approach offered a deeper understanding of the problem from both music and non-music teacher perspectives. Including views from both types of teachers strengthened our data and added confidence to our findings. We used purposeful sampling, strategically selecting participants to focus on the specific research questions in the context of music and non-music instruction (Miles et al., 2014; Stake, 1995, 2006). To explore our research questions with qualified participants (Creswell, 2013), we recruited one music teacher and two of their non-music teacher colleagues who constituted one case. All three participants had experience with and interest in practicing IME. The team of middle school teachers was located in the Southeastern United States and consisted of: Mary, a general music teacher (grades 6-8); Eleanor, a sixth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher; and Sarah, an eighth-grade science teacher.

### Data Sources

We collected data via participant interviews and teaching observations (Miles et al., 2014). As related to our previous study focused on teams of elementary teachers (Johnson et al., 2021), we invited one middle school music teacher who then identified two non-music teachers with IME experience and interest as additional participants at their school site, for a total of three participants. All participants planned their lessons with some collaboration but taught each lesson independently. For this IRB-approved study, we used pseudonyms for all participants and described their professional backgrounds in Table 1.

Consistent with qualitative research, our investigation included multiple forms of data; we interviewed each teacher once after they taught their integrated lessons, as detailed in Appendix A and observed four lessons as described in Appendix B (Emerson et al., 2011; Siedman, 2013; Stake, 1995). We observed one sixth-grade ELA lesson, one eighth-grade science lesson, one sixth-grade ELA and music lesson, and one eighth-grade science and music lesson. We video-recorded each classroom observation (between 30 and 45 minutes each) and transcribed each individual interview (between 40 and 90 minutes each) for later analysis. In addition, we collected instructional materials as artifacts to enhance our understanding of each lesson.

**Data Analysis**

We were cognizant of the themes from our original elementary school study (Johnson et al., 2021), though we did not use those themes as pre-existing codes during our analysis of the middle school data. Instead, we started anew and allowed codes to emerge during data collection and analysis (Miles et. al., 2014). We analyzed data sets inductively and deductively, searching for themes within each case and across cases. Each single-case analysis began with open coding. By reading complete sets of data for each individual participant, we gained a holistic understanding of the perceptions and experiences of each teacher (Emerson et al., 2011; Saldaña, 2016). We conducted the cross-case analysis using focused coding; by identifying recurring themes and quoting participants' own words, we maintained each participant's uniqueness through the data (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2016; Stake, 1995).

We analyzed each classroom observation for IME quality, paying particular attention to disciplinary and interdisciplinary standards. After consulting a number of widely-used rubrics and other measures of instructional quality (e.g., Danielson, 2007; Interstate New Teacher

Assessment Support Consortium, 1992; Marzano & Toth, 2013; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 1998/2013; US Department of Education, 2002), we designed a focused observational protocol with four dimensions: disciplinary instruction, interdisciplinary instruction, classroom climate/culture, and facilitating learning (Johnson et al., 2021). We evaluated each observed lesson in terms of these four dimensions, according to four standard rankings: emerging, developing, proficient, and exemplary. In our findings, we compared these ratings with Bresler's four levels: subservient, affective, social, and co-equal (1995). We also used these ratings to confirm or disconfirm our findings across data sources. For a display of our protocol, see Appendix B.

We ensured trustworthiness and validity through data triangulation, peer review, and participant checks (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). Collecting data from a variety of sources also allowed us to confirm and disconfirm evidence for emerging themes (Stake, 1995). As advocated by experts in the field (Emerson et. al, 2011; Yin, 2014), we used our researcher-generated observation protocol to aid in categorizing and organizing observations. Furthermore, we analyzed all of the data independently and then collectively agreed upon final ratings for each observation.

## Findings / Discussion

After analyzing participant responses, we identified four emergent themes that described IME in terms of the participants' perspectives and practices: (a) defining IME; (b) benefits of IME; (c) obstacles to IME; and (d) supports for IME. See Table 2 for a display of the supporting topics of each theme. In this section, we connect our findings with the related literature to show

points of intersection and inconsistencies. Although not transferable to all middle school settings, our findings may directly benefit other music and non-music teachers, along with their students.

**Defining Integrated Music Education**

Initially, we asked participants to define IME. We also looked for implied definitions throughout the interview data. Every participant defined IME in ways that aligned with multiple aspects of Bresler's four arts integration levels (1995). All three teachers noted ways that music served other disciplines or teaching goals, aligning with Bresler's subservient level. For example, science teacher Sarah described music's role as a memory tool in her science class, stating, "the more neural connections they [students] make, the more likely they are to remember all of the material." Music teacher Mary defined IME as "using music skills, using the standards, the content, and the knowledge of music, to help teach other subjects." While Mary's definition mentions musical competencies, we labeled her definition as subservient because the overall focus was on music in a supportive role.

Participants' descriptions of activities in which music served to enhance the classroom atmosphere aligned with Bresler's second level, affective integration (1995). For example, ELA teacher Eleanor emphasized the role of music in promoting student engagement, stating, "[Music] definitely influences them in a positive way…. it's amazing. They enjoy it a lot." She added that incorporating music in her science classes was "really fun" and highlighted the role of music as a "motivation factor" for her students.

Articulating Bresler's third level, integration addressing social functions (1995), Sarah reported that she used music as a tool for classroom management, but the music that she incorporated was simply a "bell ringer" to start class. Mary described music's social function with more depth, stating that "music helps with cooperative skills...collaborative skills, and

working together." She also cautioned, however, that she did not believe using music as a management tool is where educators should "hang our hats," indicating a preference for more substantial musical connections.

Finally, aligning with Bresler's fourth level, two teachers defined IME in ways that described co-equal relationships between disciplines. Probably as a function of her professional background and graduate-level work in music, Mary spoke passionately about deep connections between disciplines. She stated:

> I do think it is important for me to help the students make a connection…that there is a relationship between music and art, and music and social studies, and music and math, and music and English…because that's just the way the world is...each subject is not isolated, even though that's the way it's generally taught.

Eleanor also described a co-equal balance between disciplines, stating, "I can do music through my language arts and she [the music teacher] can do language arts through music."

In addition to examining teachers' stated and implied definitions of IME, we sought to observe evidence of Bresler's levels in their classroom practices. In some instances, teachers' definitions aligned with the teaching practices we observed, and in other cases, there were clear mismatches. Sarah's definition of IME and her teaching practices were closely aligned. She frequently referred to student motivation and the value she placed on creating a fun, engaging classroom atmosphere. Her use of music for these non-academic purposes in her observed lesson was obvious. Using our observation protocol, we rated her at the emerging level in two areas: in the authenticity of the relationship between music and science content, and in the balance of emphasis between subject areas. Eleanor's definitions of IME and her teaching practices, however, did not align. Her definitions of music centered in Bresler's subservient and affective

levels (1995), but her observed lessons demonstrated authentic connections between music and ELA. Of all the lessons we observed, she showed the most equal balance between music and non-music disciplines. She was the only teacher we rated as proficient in balancing disciplinary emphasis and in presenting an authentic interdisciplinary relationship. Mary enthusiastically expressed the importance of such an equal partnership between disciplines in her interview, stating, "I think it's important for the integration to work both ways." Looking for alignment between Mary's definitions and her practice, we sought evidence showing authentic relationships between the content areas in Mary's observed lessons. While we observed rich, substantial musical content in her lessons, the science and ELA content was presented more one-dimensionally. See Table 3 for all observation rating data.

**Benefits of Integrated Music Education**

When we analyzed the data, two categories of benefits emerged: curricular and instructional. The first category defined and described cross-curricular content while the second category described student engagement and critical thinking.

***Curricular Benefits***

The non-music teachers often described connections between disciplines such as ELA and music, or mathematics and music in terms of encouraging students to see an overall connection between subject areas. For example, Eleanor said:

> . . . They can see there's a connection between things. And I think that's the biggest factor for me. They understand that there is a connection between everything that we do. . . . If they can learn that, then their education will be a lot more beneficial to them. Anytime you can make a connection with children, that

> just broadens their horizons. . . . My four walls connect to somebody else's. So, integration of all subject areas is important.

In a parallel example, Mary expressed similar cross-curricular learning goals from a music-teaching perspective. She said:

> I am trying to reinforce what they are learning, or what they may learn in another class. And so for the students to get this information in two different classes, I think it's going to help them remember and they will be able to make better connections and be able to broaden their knowledge of the skill or content or whatever it is.

In some cases, participants spoke about the connections between music and another discipline that highlighted student learning in multiple subject areas. Eleanor said:

> She [Mary] will have kids write poems and set those to music, which is perfect because she will usually do that for sixth grade when we are studying poetry. She does that, too, and it just brings it all together.

Sarah shared how collaboration not only benefited student learning, but also benefited her ability to teach her content area. She said, "It enriches learning, [makes] more neural connections, more personal experience, [and] shared curriculum time [means] more curriculum time." In a similar vein, Mary's view of collaboration was that "It's important for the children to be well rounded and to understand that even though you're studying these individual classes, there is a relationship, and there is a connection between all of these subjects."

These teachers' accounts of music integration supporting their students' academic achievement and focusing on the importance of cross-curricular learning aligned with the findings of previous studies (Barrett, et al., 1997; Bresler, 1995; Burnaford, et al., 2013;

Cslovjecsek & Zulauf, 2018; Vaughan, 2008). During the classroom observations, however, we did not rate any lesson as demonstrating exemplary interdisciplinary instruction. This inconsistency between perception and practice relates to the obstacles and needs we observed and discuss later in this section.

***Instructional Benefits***

All participants regarded student engagement as an instructional benefit of IME. Mary said, "That was the most engaged that I have seen those kids. ...this is the most active my students have been since they've been back in the classroom [from remote learning]." Similarly, Eleanor stated that using music in her ELA classroom "gets them excited. So anytime they're excited, they're going to learn." Sarah discussed her reasoning behind her decision to incorporate a song writing project in her science class as "that engagement factor with the kids who are like, 'Science sucks, but I like music, so let's do it!'" She continued describing her students and classroom during this project:

> That was THE most engaged that I have seen them this school year. ...And I had a student in another class that actually emailed me his video from his mom's phone because his laptop didn't have a webcam. And it was just beautiful, I was about to cry watching it. So I got some engagement from students that have not otherwise been engaged this year.

Issues related to critical thinking emerged as a second instructional benefit. Sarah described the role of music integration in terms critical thinking as:

> Extremely valuable, even though I haven't practiced it a whole lot yet. Because the more you're crossing over [between subject areas and] making those neural connections, the more things go into the long term [memory]. So I would say

> [it's] extremely important, because the more crossovers you make, the more real-life applicable the results.

In a parallel statement, Mary said "I think it helps the kids develop their critical thinking skills. And that's very important, because we want our students to be able to think on their own." Mary continued this line of thought by stating:

> Because we do want to produce well rounded students, and students who can think. ...eventually, they will begin to make their own connections, to see that there is a relationship between music and English, and music and math, that they aren't separate classes. And I think that that will make a better student, a more thoughtful student, who thinks a little bit more critically about their education and learning in general.

The instructional benefits of IME discussed in this section most closely pertain to the disciplinary instructional dimension of our observation protocol. Considering these ratings, our classroom observations were inconsistent with some of the participant perceptions. In particular, we rated two lessons as proficient and two lessons as developing in terms of student engagement. In terms of critical thinking, we rated three lessons as exemplary or proficient and one lesson as developing (see Table 3). Consistent with our observations, participants also described multiple instructional benefits related to music integration that promoted critical thinking and student engagement in the classroom. These align with previous research and suggest a positive connection between critical thinking skills, student engagement in learning, and music integration (Barrett et al., 1997; Fowler, 2001; Irwin, et al., 2006; Mark et al., 2021; Montemer, 2020; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).

**Obstacles to Integrated Music Education**

Four obstacles to IME emerged as deficits in teachers' experiences. Those were a lack of: teacher efficacy, time, professional development (PD), and administrative support. We identified these as impediments or challenges that the participants encountered in their experiences with IME.

***Teacher Efficacy***

We found a noticeable imbalance between music and non-music teacher roles and responsibilities. Perhaps because of their self-perceived lack of efficacy, the non-music teachers often expected the music teacher to initiate IME. They regarded the music teacher as a valuable colleague and IME resource, but they did not feel obligated to teach the music standards. This assumption created an unequal level of teacher responsibility, as the music teacher was more inclined or expected to teach the non-music standards. Eleanor, the middle school ELA teacher, explained her reliance on the music teacher at her school by saying:

> Thank God for [Mary] because she's the one who usually initiates the integration. When she just came to me, it was to work together, but I could not do it alone, or I wouldn't be very comfortable. I could do it, but I would have to do a lot of studying myself to do that.

The non-music teachers also strongly voiced their lack of confidence to use and teach music concepts and standards. For example, when asked about her comfort level regarding integrating music in her middle school science classroom, Sarah responded, "I say that I try. I'm not necessarily comfortable with it because I don't have, like, the knowledge base but I'll try anything once. So, as far as comfort, no - way out of my comfort zone." Collaboration with their colleagues was key in enhancing confidence among all participants. As Mary reported:

> Just [to] be able to have, I think, discussions with teachers of other content areas. . . . being able to talk with that person, and find out more about that particular concept and then as this person is talking to me or explaining it to me, then the wheels inside my head begin to start turning as to how I can include that information in the music lessons . . . to help make those, those real deep, deep connections.

Eleanor echoed the importance of collaboration in her classroom as a pathway to increase teacher efficacy by saying:

> . . . the collaboration part, someone with that knowledge. I mean, I know what I teach in social studies, so if I share that with the music teacher, then the music teacher says, "Oh well I have this," and so, just the idea that you can collaborate would be the most important key.

This obstacle of low teacher efficacy is directly related to the gap between the idea of quality arts integration and its actual practice in schools, as reported by Hallmark (2012).

***Time***

All participants indicated that insufficient time for planning, collaboration, and instruction was an obstacle to IME. For example, Sarah said:

> With me being eighth-grade science, it's a matter of time. I'm a big environmental nerd so I could spend the entire year on my environmental science unit. So, it's hard to find the time to maybe be like, "Okay, music needs to go in here, art needs to go in, dance needs to go in here." [I] have a hard time prioritizing those things because I am so environmentally passionate. It's time.

Similarly, Mary stated, “Time. I could have all the time in the world and still need more time.” Eleanor also described her lack of classroom time to teach everything she needed to cover with her students and how she struggled to find any instructional time remaining to integrate music:

> So it's selfish, selfish on my part I’m sure, but I don't know that I feel responsible for [IME] because it’s not what I teach. That's how the mentality is. I’d say it's in all grades but especially in middle school because we are blocked. That's your block of time. That’s what you have to do.

When discussing IME, all participants frequently mentioned the lack of instructional time and common planning time with other teachers. They stated that collaborative IME planning was only practical before or after school. Without the administrative expectation to do so, most teachers reported that they did not plan collaboratively and that contributed to their feelings of professional isolation in their classrooms (Munroe, 2015).

***Professional Development***

A third obstacle to delivering quality IME at the middle-school level was the lack of professional development (PD). All the participants had very little experience with or memory of undergraduate-level arts integration requirements. Mary said, “I can't even remember that far back. But I really did not have any specific classes on integrating. And perhaps something may have been mentioned in a methods class, but I really do not remember.” This is an important area for improvement to benefit pre-service teachers, as Eleanor recalled her college class requirements:

> When I was in college, of course, because I'm an elementary major, we worked with the integration of music into the curriculum but, you know...since I've been out of college, none. Unfortunately, it's not a focus in our school system.

The ELA and science teachers in our study expressed a lack of comfort with music and a lack of resources for IME. Incorporating hands-on IME experiences during pre-service teacher education courses for future elementary and secondary teachers would increase familiarity and confidence in this pedagogical approach. If IME preparation was a standard part of the undergraduate experience, teachers would feel more prepared to handle these learning opportunities. If colleges and universities model IME successfully for their students, they could promote this instructional approach among future educators.

Participants indicated that successful implementation of practical PD for veteran music and non-music teachers should include providing lesson plan ideas and sharing links to online resources. Facilitation of IME technology and ready-made lessons was a need that middle-school teachers expressed to teach these lessons. Sarah mentioned, "If someone were to walk up to me and be like, 'Hey, here's a lesson plan that incorporates music and how classical music affects the growth of plants,' I feel like, 'Yeah!' So, it's a lack of resources." Providing teachers with a set of curated IME plans would address teachers' perceived lack of time to find or create their own IME lessons. Mary explained her process for integration in her music classroom:

> I do a lot of my own research. And I have studied the standard courses of study in other subjects and try to make that connection and how I could help reinforce those standards or objectives in the music class. And then I speak with teachers of those different content areas and ask about resources that they use.

Offering targeted PD opportunities for teachers to earn renewal credit and enhance their understanding of IME through courses and workshops provides music and non-music teachers time to engage and plan with curriculum that might be outside of their regular purview while also enhancing collaboration (Bresler, 2002; Strand, 2006). Giving

teachers such safe spaces to grow their self-efficacy and to familiarize themselves with additional learning standards allows them to become more comfortable with IME pedagogy (Munroe, 2015). Eleanor echoed this idea of common collaboration, stating that "just everybody getting on the same page, would be the best thing."

***Administrative Support***

The final obstacle to IME was the lack of support. Having school administrators' support for IME was seen as a crucial step for increasing learning opportunities for students. Advocating for IME would aid non-music teachers who report teaching an isolated subject or teaching to standardized tests. Sarah described her experiences by saying:

> There's nothing. We have no common planning with our colleagues at our school. No one's really willing to stay after school for anything, ever. There's not really a big push for integration at all, or anything. Like, every classroom is its own little island, and what you do in your room is what you do.

Eleanor agreed by stating:

> We do not have a common planning with the music teacher. We have common plannings [*sic*] with our grade level. And so, when I do not have children, it's when they are with the music teacher... we'd have to struggle to plan. We'd have to plan after school, not during school hours. So I would say there's not really a lot of, I don't know that our district won't recognize that it can be done, but it's not convenient for us to plan.

Participants expressed the need for PD support, at both the school and district levels. Mary expressed her views about her administration's and school district's lack of support by adding:

> We often hear from administrators and central offices, "The arts are important.

> Music is important. The arts are important." But many times, in my opinion, it sounds more like lip service. Instead of making schedules that are beneficial to music teachers and other arts teachers. ...It [IME] is just not seen as important as math and English. Yes. Even though we hear the sound bites, "The arts are important." Yeah, actions sometimes are different from words.

In addition, standardized testing expectations were a noticeable and often-cited deterrent against the use of IME instruction. Sarah questioned her priorities by asking, "Do I have the time to take three weeks on this integrated unit? …[Science] is being tested, so I have to hit all the science content." Sarah's comment highlighted the heightened level of focus on standardized test scores expected of non-music teachers.

Taken together, these four obstacles to IME are consistent with the research literature characterizing IME as being limited and of low quality (e.g., NCES, 2012). They also confirm observation-based findings in previous studies, indicating that the majority of arts integration activities align with subservient level, while co-equal are least common (Bresler, 2002; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Wiggins, 2001).

**Supports for IME**

Two supports for IME emerged as targeted PD and teacher communication. While participants indicated that they needed PD to support IME, they also reported that they actually practiced effective communication with their colleagues to support IME. Depending on the specific interactions, teacher communication sometimes supported and other times impeded IME. Our discussion here focuses on examples of teacher communication that encouraged IME practices.

Mary articulated the need for targeted PD to support IME by commenting on the

interdisciplinary teaching skills and confidence levels of her colleagues. She said, “They [the non-music teachers] just don't feel comfortable in their knowledge of music, and the other arts, in order to have effective integration.” Mary offered more detail by referencing an example of subservient integration from her own research:

> Many times we arts educators...are asked, “Oh we are studying frogs, can you sing a song about frogs?” The results of my study found that a lot of teachers...don't understand music enough to feel confident with integrating music into their lessons.

Taking a more assertive tone, Mary advocated for the benefits of PD to reach students, administrators, and other teachers. She said:

> We have to educate ourselves, through our own PD and professional development, so that we can educate our students and educate our colleagues. I have kind of gotten my principal to the point that he does not say that music is not core.

Teacher communication was the other major support for IME instruction. All three participants reported that IME pedagogy benefitted from professional collaborations and, even on a basic level, increased their professional interactions. For example, when asked about preparing and delivering IME lessons, Sarah said, “Co-teaching time with the music teacher” would be the most helpful. Eleanor described collaboration as a teacher bond to support IME by saying, “I think that's where she [Mary] and I agree and why we have a bond because we can see that that can happen.” From the music teaching perspective, Mary described collaborating with Eleanor in terms of professional conversations and sharing resources. Even when limited to a superficial level, those communications were effective. Mary reported that:

> I did communicate with the English language arts teacher [Eleanor]...just to ask her what they were doing...she sent me a few quotes, she sent me the summary. And I shared with her the idea that I had. Outside of that, there wasn't any other discussion. I don't know if I consider that true collaboration or not. It could be on a small level. Just the fact that I guess, she was sharing some of those resources.

**Summary**

The emergent themes and observation ratings addressed our two research questions: (a) what were participants' perceptions of IME; and (b) how did participants' observed instructional practices demonstrate IME quality (i.e. disciplinary and interdisciplinary instruction)? Our findings described the variety of ways participants defined IME in both procedural and practical terms, aligning with all four levels that Bresler previously established (1995). We also found themes that framed participant understanding of and engagement with IME in terms of its benefits, related obstacles, and needed supports. These findings are consistent with our earlier research at the elementary level (Johnson et al., 2021) and extend this line of research on IME perceptions and practices.

In addressing the first research question, we noted how participants included examples of all four IME levels when defining this type of pedagogy: subservient, affective, social, and co-equal (Bresler, 1995). Most of the interview data emphasized lower-level IME, consistent with the related literature (Abril & Gault, 2006). When describing the benefits of IME, participants described either curricular or instructional benefits: advantages that focused on either learning in specific subjects or applied broadly to multiple disciplines. The theme of obstacles to IME also factored into the first research question, with four distinct deficits of teacher efficacy, time, PD, and administrative support. PD and communication emerged as obstacles to IME when they were

missing, but as IME supports when they were present, i.e., when targeted PD was provided and when teacher communication was effective. These two aspects of the interview data indicated the value of intentional planning and collaboration, and that high-quality IME requires a focus on both.

In addressing the second research question, we found several inconsistencies between teachers' perceptions and practices of IME. For example, while some interview responses described deep interdisciplinary connections, our observations of those teachers' actual lessons did not match their defined IME level. Similarly, we noticed how participants' actual practice of realizing instructional benefits by using IME was not as effective as their aspirations, which is consistent with related literature (Giles & Frego, 2004; O'Keefe et al., 2016). These findings also reinforce the assertion that actual IME practice is less robust than the founding pedagogical ideals (Hallmark, 2012).

## Implications

This study has numerous implications for a broad audience of music and non-music teachers, at the pre-service and in-service levels, along with teacher-educators and other PD leaders. Those implications include the need for a clear and consistent definition of IME with curricular connections to music and non-music disciplines. By clarifying what IME is and its best practices from the research data, teachers and teacher-educators can better advance this cross-curricular pedagogy. They can also explain and advocate for IME with administrators and other teachers.

For music teachers, implications of this study include promoting more balanced responsibilities with their non-music teacher colleagues and practicing IME more often at the co-equal level. Although lower levels of IME contribute to student learning in some meaningful

ways (Giles & Frego, 2004; Hallmark, 2012), increasing the rigor of IME pedagogy will enhance its reputation and recognition among other teachers and administrators. Elevating IME practices will also highlight the Connecting strand as one of the four NCAS process standards (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2015). Along with Creating, Performing, and Responding, music teachers can justify and extend the relationship of their music curricula to other subjects for more meaningful and engaging instruction (Shuler et al., 2014). Especially given the notable increase in student engagement shown in this study, implications for middle-school learners in terms of attitude and future academic success may have a particularly important impact (Mark et al., 2021).

For non-music teachers, implications include finding ways to make music and lead music-related activities with their students. Communicating and cooperating with their music-teacher colleagues are important first steps, along with seeking targeted PD opportunities and related resources to increase confidence levels with group singing, writing parody songs, and making simple instruments. By doing so, they will shift music's place in their classrooms from an unrelated "special" subject to an integrated activity with meaningful and clearly defined connections. Incorporating such IME design has resulted in greater student engagement (Burton et al., 2000; Moss et al., 2018), along with increased academic test scores and other less quantitative measures (Johnson & Howell, 2009; Noblit et al., 2000; Noblit et al., 2009). For both music and non-music teachers, results of this study may provide motivation for more frequent and more substantive teacher collaborations. Through focused and collegial conversations, all teachers could address professional isolation and demonstrate more effective, engaging instruction (Bresler, 2002; Della Pietra, 2010; Munroe, 2015; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Strand, 2006). Related outcomes could include advocacy for enhanced support from

administrators who recognize and value this type of pedagogy. Their support could directly address the obstacles to IME (e.g., lack of time and PD), as articulated in this study and our previous research (Johnson et al., 2021).

One overarching implication is bridging the gap between theory and practice, specifically regarding IME. Simply put, applying IME in effective, co-equal instruction is a challenge and requires a particular skill set. Implementing high-quality IME also necessitates relevant, practical, and repeated IME experiences to realize substantial and sustained gains in student academic achievement. Implications for PD leaders are addressing this gap with targeted activities and cooperative lesson planning. Implications for teacher-educators include transforming introductory arts education classes from passive survey courses to active, practical experiences that demonstrate the potential of IME to pre-service students (Battersby & Cave, 2014). By beginning with pre-service teachers, teacher-educators could foster an inclusive attitude toward the curriculum and promote a more holistic sense of education in general.

In future research, investigators could explore the efficacy and prevalence of integrated arts education courses at the collegiate level. Understanding more about this factor in teacher preparation could allow researchers to address obstacles and promote the advantages of IME pedagogy. From that viewpoint, PD leaders and teacher-educators may effectively address the obstacles to facilitate more integrated learning experiences. Although not a simple or quick pedagogical shift, adopting IME as a teaching approach offers a range of curricular and instructional advantages for the benefit of both music and non-music teachers, as well as their students.

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**Table 1**

*Participant Profiles*

| Participant | Teaching Area | Teaching Experience | Degrees and Certifications | Interdisciplinary Preparation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mary | 6th-8th grade Music | 27 years | BME, MEd, PhD Music Education, Orff Level III Certification, World Music Drumming Certification, Board Certified Music Therapist | PD[a] sessions, Graduate courses |
| Eleanor | 6th grade English Language Arts (ELA) | 28 years | BS in Early Childhood, ELA Certification (6th-8th grade) | Undergraduate course |
| Sarah | 8th grade Science | 2 years | BA in Middle Grade Education, concentration in Science and Social Studies | PD sessions |

[a] Professional Development (PD)

**Table 2**

*Findings*

| Themes | Sub-themes | |
|---|---|---|
| Defining IME | Inexact terminology usage | |
| | A range of integration | |
| Benefits of IME | Curricular | Instructional |
| | Cross-curricular learning | Student engagement |
| | | Critical thinking |
| Obstacles to IME | Teacher efficacy | |
| | Time | |
| | Professional development | |
| | Administrative support | |
| Supports for IME | Targeted professional development | |
| | Teacher communication | |

**Table 3**

*Observation Ratings*

| | Mary 6th grade Music | Mary 8th grade Music | Eleanor 6th grade ELA | Sarah 8th grade Science |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interdisciplinary Instruction | | | | |
| Disciplinary standards | D | P | D | Em |
| Authentic relationships | D | D | P | Em |
| Balance of emphasis | Em | Em | P | Em |
| Disciplinary Instruction | | | | |
| Disciplinary standards | P | Ex | P | P |
| Discipline-specific knowledge | P | Ex | P | P |
| Student engagement | P | P | D | D |
| Critical thinking/collaboration | P | Ex | Ex | D |
| Classroom Climate/Culture | | | | |
| Teacher/student relationship | P | Ex | P | P |
| Teacher communication | P | Ex | Ex | P |
| Diversity advocacy | P | P | P | D |
| Facilitating Learning | | | | |
| Variety of demonstrations | P | P | P | P |
| Quality of assessment | D | P | N/A | P |
| Alignment | N/A | D | D | D |

Note. Em = *emerging*; D = *developing*; P = *proficient*; Ex = *exemplary*.

## Appendix A

## Interview Questions

Demographics/Education/Background:

1. Name, position, grade(s)
2. School, district
3. How long have you been teaching in your current position? Overall?
4. What degrees/certifications do you hold?
5. What do you consider to be the definition of music integration?
6. How long have you been integrating music?
7. How often do you integrate music?
8. What percentage of your teaching involves music integration?
9. What training have you received related to music integration? Undergraduate courses? Professional development? Other?
10. Rate your own comfort/ability/knowledge regarding music integration lessons.

Lesson/Observation:

1. Talk me through your lesson plan.
2. Was this lesson an extension of the previous lesson?
3. What prior knowledge did students have before today's lesson?
4. How well do you think it went?
5. How would you describe the way/s you integrated music (or other content area) in this lesson?
6. What changes would you make to today's lesson if you were going to teach it again?
7. Did the students meet your goals/objectives? How do you know?
8. Describe any collaborative preparation for this lesson you had with a teacher/colleague.
9. Are you addressing music and classroom standards or just your specific discipline? Why? How?

   *Classroom teacher—*

   10a. How comfortable are you teaching music skills/concepts in your classroom?

   10b. Do you feel responsible for meeting music objectives in your classroom?

   10c. Should music teachers integrate content from other subjects with music? How often?

   *Music teacher—*

   10d. How comfortable are you teaching skills/concepts of other disciplines in your classroom?

   10e. Do you feel responsible for meeting objective in other disciplines in your classroom?

   10f. Should classroom teachers integrate music content with other subjects? How often?

Teacher Perceptions:

1. What structures does your district or school have in place to support music integration?
2. What factors impact your decisions to integrate music with other subjects?
3. What factors impact your ability to integrate music with other subjects?
4. What would be most helpful to you in <u>preparing</u> music integration lessons?
5. What would be most helpful to you in <u>delivering</u> music integration lessons?

Appendix B

Observation Protocol

| Domains | Dimensions | Evidence Observed or Collected (open-ended response) |
|---|---|---|
| Emerging<br><br>(not demonstrated) | CLASSROOM CLIMATE/CULTURE<br><br>1. Students do not have a positive relationship with the teacher.<br>2. The teachers does not communicate effectively.<br>3. The teacher does not embrace diversity in the class or school community.<br><br>DISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teacher usually does not align discipline-specific instruction to meet grade-level standards.<br>2. The teacher does not demonstrate their discipline-specific knowledge to support their instruction.<br>3. The teacher does not make instruction relevant to students.<br>4. The teacher does not assist students in developing skills in teamwork, critical-thinking, or other higher-order thinking.<br><br>INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teacher's instruction does not lead students to show evidence that they meet standards in either discipline.<br>2. The teacher does not demonstrate the use of authentic relationships between disciplines (lack of valid connection).<br>3. The teacher does not demonstrate a balance of emphasis between the disciplines in the lesson (understandings in music and another discipline are not equally valued and recognized.<br><br>FACILITATING LEARNING<br><br>1. The teacher usually does not use a variety of methods or collect evidence of student learning in different formats.<br>2. The teacher usually does not analyze student learning. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 3. The teacher does not use appropriate objectives or assessments for the lesson. | |
| Developing<br><br>(somewhat<br>demonstrated) | CLASSROOM CLIMATE/CULTURE<br><br>1. Students generally have a positive and nurturing relationship with the teacher.<br>2. The teacher sometimes communicates effectively.<br>3. The teacher somewhat embraces diversity in the class and/or school community.<br><br>DISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teacher somewhat aligns discipline-specific instruction to meet grade-level standards.<br>2. The teacher somewhat demonstrates their discipline-specific knowledge to support their instruction.<br>3. The teacher somewhat makes instruction relevant to students.<br>4. The teacher somewhat assists students in developing skills in collaborative teamwork, critical-thinking, and/or other higher-order thinking.<br><br>INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teacher's instruction leads students to show evidence that they meet standards in only one discipline.<br>2. The teacher marginally demonstrates the use of authentic relationships between disciplines (minimally valid connection).<br>3. The teacher somewhat demonstrates a balance of emphasis between disciplines in the lesson (understandings in music and another discipline and somewhat equally valued and recognized).<br><br>FACILITATING LEARNING<br><br>1. The teacher sometimes uses a variety of methods or collects evidence in different formats to assess students learning.<br>2. The teacher sometimes analyzes students learning.<br>3. The teacher uses somewhat appropriately aligned objectives and assessments for the lesson. | |
| Proficient<br><br>(effectively<br>demonstrated) | CLASSROOM CLIMATE/CULTURE<br><br>1. Each student has a positive and nurturing relationship with the teacher.<br>2. The teacher communicates effectively,<br>3. The teacher regularly embraces diversity in the class and school community. | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | DISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teacher regularly aligns discipline-specific instruction to meet grade-level standards.<br>2. The teacher regularly demonstrates their discipline-specific knowledge to support their instruction.<br>3. The teacher regularly makes instruction relevant to students.<br>4. The teacher regularly assists students in developing skills in collaborative teamwork, critical-thinking, and other higher-order thinking.<br><br>INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teachers' instruction leads students to show evidence that they meet standards in each integrated discipline.<br>2. The teacher demonstrates the use of authentic relationships between disciplines (valid connection).<br>3. The teacher effectively demonstrates a balance of emphasis between the disciplines in the lesson (understandings in music and another discipline are equally valued and recognized).<br><br>FACILITATING LEARNING<br><br>1. The teacher uses a variety of methods or collects evidence in different formats to assess student learning<br>2. The teacher analyzes student learning.<br>3. The teacher uses appropriately aligned objectives and assessments for the lesson. | |
| Exemplary<br><br>(meritoriously<br><br>demonstrated) | CLASSROOM CLIMATE/CULTURE<br><br>1. Each student has a positive and nurturing relationship with the teacher as an adult who cares.<br>2. The teacher consistently communicates effectively.<br>3. The teacher consistently embraces diversity in the class, school community, and the world.<br><br>DISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teacher effectively aligns all discipline-specific instruction to meet grade-level standards.<br>2. The teacher effectively demonstrates their discipline-specific knowledge to support their instruction.<br>3. The teacher effectively makes all instruction relevant to students.<br>4. The teacher effectively assists students in developing skills in collaborative teamwork, critical-thinking, and other higher-order thinking | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION<br><br>1. The teacher's instruction leads students to show evidence that they meet standards in each integrated discipline equally.<br>2. The teacher highlights authentic relationships between disciplines (exceptional connection).<br>3. The teacher meritoriously demonstrates a balance of emphasis between the disciplines in the lesson (understandings in music and another discipline are highlighted and promoted).<br><br>FACILITATING LEARNING<br><br>1. The teacher effectively uses a variety of methods and collects evidence in different formats to assess student learning.<br>2. The teacher effectively analyzes student learning.<br>3. The teacher effectively uses appropriately aligned objectives and assessments for the lesson. | |