

ELEMENTARY MUSIC TEACHER  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCES

by

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## Abstract

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Several recent studies have been conducted on teacher professional development (PD) but few have focused exclusively on elementary music teacher PD. Prominent music education researchers encourage additional research to provide generalizability across the field. In answer to this call for broadening the base of research in elementary music educator PD, this study surveyed 479 practicing elementary music teachers. The purpose of this investigation was to study elementary music educators to determine what PD activities they need and desire.

This is a cross-sectional descriptive study of elementary music educator PD, particularly studying the needs and wants of elementary general music teachers. The results of this study will improve PD offerings for music educators by increasing understanding on the part of PD providers of the PD needs and desires of music educators. In this context, the present study helps define the current state of elementary music teacher PD, what offerings elementary music teachers deem are needed, what delivery models are preferred, and how the changing educational climate is affecting elementary music educator PD.

The results of this study show that elementary music teachers believe that PD should be content-specific and performance based. PD that is not related to the music curriculum is often viewed by these teachers as irrelevant and not meaningful. Meaningful PD must focus on the curricular standards for which the music teacher is responsible. The respondents in this study affirmed that practicing teacher leadership by sharing best practices among music colleagues is viewed as an effective means of achieving PD goals and thereby increasing student achievement in music.

Elementary music teachers participate in many professional development activities. Data analysis from this study shows that elementary music teachers incorporate various strategies and methods learned from PD into their teaching practice. Furthermore, the data show a strong desire on the part of elementary music teachers to continue professional development studies in Orff Schulwerk, Kodály methods, teaching with technology, standards-based teaching, and assessment. This dictates that PD providers, from local schools through national music organizations, must make every effort to deliver content-specific PD in these priority areas.

# ELEMENTARY MUSIC TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCES

## Introduction

In answer to the call for broadening the base of research in elementary music educator professional development (PD), this study surveyed 479 practicing elementary music teachers. The survey sample was comprised of all MENC elementary division members in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee with valid email addresses on file with MENC. Approximately two out of three respondents had 11 or more years of experience teaching elementary music. The survey questions were designed to provide insight regarding the PD wants and needs of elementary music teachers. The knowledge generated from this study makes known what continuing PD opportunities are necessary to meet the needs and desires of elementary music teachers in the era of NCLB. Significant demographic findings are also identified.

The survey results give a broad picture of what activities gleaned from PD are incorporated into classroom instruction, and what professional learning experiences are needed to increase student achievement in the elementary music classroom. The findings also begin to identify the motivation of elementary music teachers to engage in PD. This information is useful to PD planners and providers at local, state, and national levels because it identifies the PD topics that are desired for study by elementary music teachers.

Fueled by the school reform movement, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 ushered in an era of accountability unlike any other. Driven by national content standards and NCLB, the education community has placed painstaking emphasis on PD designed to help educators teach and assess the standards (Lehman, 2000; Shuler, 2005; Yager, 2005). PD has received national attention from the music education community through inclusion in the MENC strategic plan (MENC, 2007). Due to the scarcity of prior data, there is a critical need to further explore elementary music teacher PD. Continued research is necessary to ensure that future PD offerings will meet the needs of music educators. Research is also necessary to determine the most desirable means of delivering PD. Music education scholars and researchers continually call for additional research in music teacher PD to triangulate data and to reveal generalizable results, leading to new theories surrounding music educator PD.

Many teachers enjoy learning techniques to meet new challenges, upgrading their skills, enhancing their practice, and expanding their repertoire of strategies. To paraphrase a Chinese proverb and Ecclesiastes 10:10 of the Bible, the ax must be sharp if one is to effectively chop wood. Otherwise, great effort is expended but only minimal results are achieved. Without PD, one fails to sharpen the ax and therefore progress, including student achievement, decreases. PD not only keeps the ax sharp, but also adds new tools to the toolbox. While all teachers need to keep the ax sharp, it must be noted that teachers in different disciplines need different axes; one size does not fit all. Importantly, teachers need adequate time to plan and implement new strategies learned during these professional learning experiences.

Not all researchers agree with terms such as *in-service* or with the learning models that they imply. Joan Richardson, former director of publications for the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), proposes that the term in-service be “buried [along

with] all of the outdated practices that go with it” (Richardson, 2007). Included in her inventory of outdated practices is the phrase *professional development programs* because of the implication of a closed-ended system with a specific beginning and end as opposed to the connotation of lifelong learning associated with the phrase *professional learning*. By any name, music teacher PD must evolve to consist of predominantly long-range research-based activities focused on specific goals, with specific measurable objectives. It is no longer adequate for teachers to sit idly by while content is delivered to them in a single dose, either in a meeting, in-service presentation, or weekend workshop. Long range reinforcement and follow-up helps to assure that new behaviors are supported and new habits are formed; this leads to classroom implementation which results in increased student achievement (Killion, 2002).

One aspect of this study serves as a needs assessment of elementary music teacher PD. The analysis of this research helps PD providers by providing them with data on the wants and needs of elementary music educators; this information is necessary to design PD that will fill the gap between teacher knowledge and student needs. It is presumptuous to believe that meaningful PD can be realized without insight into these wants and needs. This study also serves to inform music educators, music supervisors, building administrators, policy planners, and PD providers of the necessity of content-specific PD for music educators.

#### Learning Goals Drive Professional Development

Among other researchers, Cwikla (2003) identifies the need for teachers’ professional learning goals to inform PD offerings, stipulating that “research on effective professional development should be guided by the learning goals for teachers.” The necessity for PD to be based on the needs of practicing teachers forms the impetus behind the current study; this study identifies the needs and wants, otherwise known as learning goals, of elementary music teachers. The Tarnowski and Murphy (2003) study champions the same line of reasoning as Cwikla by identifying, through research, the PD activities that are designated by music educators as areas of need. These need-based activities represent learning goals that can be transformed into PD offerings. Tarnowski and Murphy also identify what new activities learned through PD are incorporated into classroom instruction. Continued research of this nature is necessary to inform future PD offerings and to make generalizations about PD over various sectors of the music education field such as elementary music, secondary general music, choral music, and instrumental music.

There are several significant PD initiatives identified in Title II of NCLB. Section (b) (6) suggests “technology, peer networks, and distance learning” (NCLB, 2002) as strategies for the delivery of new teacher training, and section (b) (7) (A) directs that the “professional development activities . . . will be developed collaboratively” by the stakeholders of the local schools. Section (b) (10) goes on to direct the states to hold local educational agencies “accountable for meeting the annual measurable objectives” of achieving a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. Section 2113, (c) (2) (A) suggests “teacher mentoring, team teaching, reduced class schedules, and intensive professional development” as strategies to develop highly qualified teachers. PD researchers are evaluating the effectiveness of many of these initiatives.

High quality preservice training and continuing PD is requisite to developing highly qualified teachers. Significant findings in the best practices of PD are summarized by Richardson in the *Phi Delta Kappan*; Richardson states,

Research-based professional development exhibits a number of characteristics. It should:

- [1.] be school wide;
- [2.] be long-term with follow-up;
- [3.] encourage collegiality;
- [4.] foster agreement among participants on goals and vision;
- [5.] have a supportive administration;
- [6.] have access to adequate funds for materials, outside speakers, substitute teachers, and so on;
- [7.] develop buy-in among participants;
- [8.] acknowledge participants' existing beliefs and practices; and
- [9.] make use of an outside facilitator/staff developer. (2003)

PD must also provide a connection to authentic application of the desired skill or technique. PD must be relevant to classroom practice and have a positive impact on student achievement. Therefore, to achieve the goals of NCLB Title II, Richardson's characteristics should be considered when designing and implementing PD.

PD is becoming an integral part of national standards in the Arts as well as other areas. The National Science Education Standards (NSES) advocate PD as a means of achieving the objectives of the standards. Yager (2005) describes the NSES as requiring a paradigm shift from teacher-based lessons to collaborative, experiential student-based lessons; the standards "clearly state nine ways teaching should change to result in more and better student learning" (p. 18). Dewey would be complimentary of these efforts at placing less emphasis on teacher lecture and more emphasis on student inquiry. Yager continues to describe how PD must change in the same manner, moving from lecture to experiential learning. PD must involve specific goals that capture the interest and attention of the teacher and it must prepare the teacher to successfully implement classroom instruction that leads to increased student achievement. Hookey (2002) contributes, "the ultimate assessment of professional development rests on the influence that teacher learning has on the students in the classroom" (p. 897). Bauer (2007) stresses, continued "research on the relationship of music teacher professional development to student achievement is essential" (p. 20).

### Professional Development and Student Achievement

Within education, and particularly within music education, the topic of professional development (PD) has risen to national prominence. The dialectic of PD is spurred by the educational reform movement, academic content standards, and NCLB; NCLB legally and officially recognizes the arts, and thus music, as part of the core curriculum (NCLB, 2002). Sparks and Richardson (1997), writing for the National Staff Development Council, begin *A Primer on Professional Development* with the pronouncement, "effective staff development focuses on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of teachers, administrators, and other school employees so all students can learn and perform at high levels" (p. 2). In a departure from an era when the

effectiveness of PD was judged by the quantity of available refreshments, this statement clearly establishes the intended relationship between PD and student achievement.

Further, NCLB mandates all teachers be highly qualified (NCLB). *MENC: The National Association for Music Education* (MENC) also places a great emphasis on the importance of PD; MENC delineates “improving professional development opportunities for beginning and experienced [music] teachers” (MENC, 2007, p. 2) as a key component of the MENC Strategic Plan. The Society for Music Teacher Education heralds PD as an area for strategic planning and action. In compliance with these government mandates and professional organization declarations, many music teachers, supervisors, and researchers are placing extraordinary emphasis on PD (Conway, 2008; Hammel, 2007; Hookey, 2002; Jorgensen, 2002; Siebert, 2008; Stanley, 2009; Westbury, 2002).

NCLB has identified student achievement as the focusing lens of PD (NCLB, 2002). Distilled into the most basic analysis, the outcome of PD must be a sustained positive effect on student achievement. Strategies are necessary to determine what music educators need and what they desire from PD to increase student achievement. Until a comprehensive body of research-based strategies is developed and implemented, music educator PD will remain haphazard. “We need to ask teachers what they need and how they want to spend their time” (Conway, Hibbard, Albert, and Hourigan, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate elementary music teacher PD activities, to determine what motivates elementary music teachers to participate in those activities and to discover what activities elementary music teachers desire for future PD in a context of maintaining *highly qualified* status under NCLB.

In keeping with general education PD practice, leaders in music teacher PD must formulate long-range research-based strategies encompassing specific goals and specific measurable objectives (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). The goals of PD must be long range, and so must be the reinforcement; follow-up helps to ensure that new behaviors are supported and new habits are formed (Cwikla, 2003). This leads to classroom implementation resulting in increased student achievement (Yager, 2005, p. 23). PD goals must be based on the educators’ needs and desires; the music educator must set goals that will have a positive impact on student achievement in the music classroom. Conway, Hibbard, Albert, and Hourigan (2005) affirm the need for content-based PD, particularly for arts educators. Expressed another way, “effective staff development helps teachers acquire the most up-to-date knowledge of the subjects they teach and of techniques that are most powerful in promoting student learning” (Sparks and Richardson, 1997, p. 4). After assimilating the new research-based knowledge and techniques, teachers employ these new skills in their professional practice to advance student achievement.

Fishman, Marx, Best, and Tal (2003) remark, “we maintain that professional development should fundamentally be about teacher learning: changes in the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers that lead to the acquisition of new skills, new concepts, and new processes related to the work of teaching.” Mundry (2005) adds, “knowledge of content also helps teachers to develop an essential ingredient for effective teaching, their specialized professional knowledge, called pedagogical content knowledge.” Mundry summarizes, “educators are now recognizing professional development as a tool focused on building the knowledge and skills of teachers to enhance student outcomes.” Bauer (2007) concisely states, “the worth of any professional development experience is

dependent on the impact it has on teachers, and ultimately on those teachers' students" (p. 14). Sparks and Richardson, Bauer, Danielson, Mundry, and Fishman et al. concur that improvement in teachers' learning, knowledge and skill leads to effective teaching, resulting in increased student achievement, the hallmark of PD.

### Background of the Study

Upon formally or informally interviewing music educators, it becomes apparent that funding for content-specific music educator PD is not high on the typical school budget priority list. Hence, many meaningful PD experiences are denied to music educators due to a lack of funds. Elementary schools with over-stretched budgets are more likely to spend their meager PD funds to address subjects such as "language arts and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and interdisciplinary studies" (Killion, 2002, p. 33) that are taught by the majority of classroom teachers and are tested on NCLB mandated exams. Consequently, local funds are often prioritized for PD in subjects such as language arts, math, and sciences. The Council for Basic Education surveyed 956 principals concerning the state of liberal arts in their schools since the implementation of NCLB; 25% of the principals responded that instructional time devoted to arts education had decreased (Council for Basic Education, 2004). Program and budget cuts lead to the reality that many meaningful PD experiences are only available at personal expense to the elementary music educator.

As an alternative to the expense of bringing in outside experts or sending music teachers to conferences and workshops, some school districts utilize local teacher leaders as PD facilitators; these teachers share best practices with peers. In fact, Friedrichs (2001) found that music teachers desire an increase in opportunities to share best practices with peers, and Bush (2007) and Conway (2008) found that music teachers prefer learning from colleagues. This type of teacher leadership is occurring throughout many disciplines and can be effective for music teachers. Just as in the NCLB-endorsed National Writing Project (NWP, n.d.) model, teacher leaders prepare in-service lessons centered on their own best practices, demonstrate them to other educators, and engage themselves and the group in the study of the theory behind the practice. Indeed, Conway established that universally, among all the music teachers in her study, "informal interactions with other music teachers" (p. 12) comprised the most significant component of PD. The same group of respondents disparaged "district-sponsored non-music professional development programs" (p. 12) due to the lack of relevance to the music classroom.

Bernard (2009) concluded that elementary music teachers preferred "A local best practices sharing session demonstrating music lesson plans and assessments for music classroom use" as the PD method most likely to help increase student achievement in music (p. 108). Stanley (2009) supports the concept of sharing sessions within learning communities or more specifically, *collaborative teacher study groups* (CTSG) where peers "learn through interaction and sharing ideas" (p. 3). Stanley explains that CTSG meetings "energized the teachers, gave them new ideas appropriate for their context, and increased their feelings of belonging to a professional, intellectual community" (p. 298); she also explains the elements and structure that led to the success of the CTSG in her study. Of primary importance is that in the CTSG, teachers go beyond merely sharing best practices by examining videos of actual teaching practice in order to "strengthen our basis of professional knowledge on which to build improvements in teaching and learning

for all” (p. 300). This examination of a real-world classroom setting moves best practices from abstract to concrete.

### Significance of this Study

Several recent studies have been conducted on teacher PD, but few have focused on music teacher PD (Bowles, 2003; Bush, 2007; Conway, 2008; Conway, 2003; Friedrichs, 2001; Madsen & Hancock, 2002; Tarnowski & Murphy, 2003). In music education research, pre-service music teacher education has received increased attention from researchers; however, the needs of practicing music educators have been largely overlooked (Campbell & Thompson, 2007; Conway, 2002). Of the few music studies, only Tarnowski & Murphy (2003) focused exclusively on elementary music teacher PD. Bauer (2007) encourages additional research “to develop broad perspectives and detailed understandings” (p. 20) of music educator PD. He suggests continued emphasis on diverse topics to provide generalizability across the field. Bush (2007) cautions that results may not be generalizable in different regions of the country and encourages replication of studies “to determine if the results are nationally representative” (p. 15).

PD for the experienced music educator has lately emerged as an important topic among music education researchers. Conway, Hibbard, Albert, and Hourigan (2005) ask, “How can arts teachers take on a more active role in shaping the types of professional development experiences that they have access to?” (p. 8). This study is one means for arts teachers, specifically elementary music teachers, to help shape the future of elementary music teacher PD. The information presented in this study helps fill the gaps in existing knowledge by quantifying the expressed wants and needs of a population of elementary music teachers. This study also compares a few of the responses submitted to Tarnowski and Murphy in 2003 by elementary music teachers in Wisconsin and Minnesota with current responses from music educators in the Southeastern United States. This shows that the responses are generalizable across these two areas of the country. The responses also show that the implementation of NCLB has impacted elementary music teacher PD.

One aspect of this study serves as a needs assessment of elementary music teacher PD. Knowledge gleaned from the current study clearly expresses what PD is desired by elementary music teachers in the Southeastern United States. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) caution that data from such a needs assessment should be viewed in the context of student achievement and should be used to design PD that “focuses on the gap between the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes and those currently possessed by staff members” (p. 41). The analysis of this data will prove helpful to PD providers by explaining the current state, wants and needs of practicing elementary music educators. This study also serves to inform music educators, music supervisors, building administrators, policy planners, and PD providers of the necessity of content-specific PD for music educators.

### Summary of Study Findings and Conclusions

The demographic data collected in this study is very meaningful to the field of music education, and particularly relevant to music education researchers. The majority of respondents indicated that they have 11 or more years of teaching experience. The fact that fewer than 15% of the sample were National Board Certified music teachers implies that more emphasis should be placed by PD providers on helping music teachers attain

this achievement. Also, only 2.5% of the sample possess a State Leadership Certificate. This may indicate that music teachers who pursue certification in leadership leave the music education field for administrative positions. However, it may be indicative of the need to train and develop strong leaders within the music education field. Such leaders will be the music supervisors and policy makers of the future.

It is troublesome that over half of the respondents indicated that they plan to remain an elementary music teacher for fewer than 11 more years. This high projected rate of attrition suggests that there will be unfilled vacancies in elementary music classrooms unless action is taken to recruit and train highly qualified replacement teachers. The middle school students of the present are the beginning teachers of the next decade. It is the responsibility of all music teachers at every level to encourage, nurture and develop the music teachers of the future.

Encouraging data revealed that over half the sample held a Master's degree or higher. This could merely indicate that music educators with post-baccalaureate degrees understand the benefit of completing research surveys, hence they were more likely to return a completed survey. However, it may indicate that music teachers place significant value on continuing education. In response, higher education schools must continue to reach out to practicing music educators by designing advanced degree programs that are pragmatic and focus on student achievement in the music classroom. Music teachers need effective strategies for teaching and assessing the music standards. The mission of higher education cannot stop with educating future teachers, or even with the continuing education of practicing teachers. The mission must extend to cultivating teachers who foster generations of children who grow to possess a life-long love and understanding of music.

#### *Do elementary music teachers find professional development meaningful?*

The argument can be made that due to their membership in MENC, the sample of music educators in this study were already biased toward a belief that PD is meaningful. One of the primary functions of a professional organization such as MENC is to provide professional learning experiences for its membership, and therefore one of the motivating factors in joining such an organization may be to have access to professional journals, conferences, and other continuing education activities. Despite this potential predisposition towards PD, the respondents provided valuable insight as to what PD they consider to be meaningful and what PD they find ineffective.

During formal and informal conversations with elementary music teachers, PD is often reviled for lack of applicability and lack of practical application in the music classroom. Even during content-specific PD, surreptitious complaints about the lack of applicability in the music classroom abound. At other times, music teachers complain about lack of depth, repetition or a dearth of new PD ideas. These issues make this topic compelling.

When questioned as to why they participated in PD, the respondents overwhelmingly chose the response, "To increase my knowledge or skill by learning new teaching methods" (Bernard, 2009, p. 92). This indicates that elementary music teachers expect PD to be meaningful. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents reported that they had studied "Teaching the music curriculum/standards in the general music classroom"; "Orff Schulwerk methods"; "Multicultural topics in the general music

classroom”; “Technology for teaching music”; “Assessing students in the general music classroom” and “Behavior management in the general music classroom.” This may indicate a desire to be familiar with multiple techniques, or it may indicate that the teachers are still searching for effective teaching methods. However, the majority of the respondents reported using all of the above methods in their teaching practice based on the data from Item 10 on the survey, “Which of the following do you regularly incorporate into your elementary school teaching.” Moreover, the majority of respondents reported the desire for future study in the areas of “Technology for teaching music” (62.8%) and “Orff Schulwerk methods” (50.9%). A large number also wished to study “Kodály methods”; “Assessing students in the general music classroom” and “Teaching the music curriculum/standards in the general music classroom.” It is noted that the survey choices of potential PD activities were limited; topics such as vocal or instrumental pedagogy, conducting, grant writing, advocacy, community relations, and many others could have been included.

When comparing the techniques regularly incorporated by these music teachers with the topics they would like to study in the future, a significant relationship was found in the areas of “Kodály methods”; “Multicultural topics in the general music classroom”; “Orff Schulwerk methods” and “Technology for teaching music” (Bernard, 2009, p. 95). Accordingly, this sample of music teachers would like to pursue further study of the above topics which they already incorporate into their classroom practice. It is plausible that individual music teachers choose to study what they already know and enjoy, and that perhaps they incorporate those familiar techniques into their teaching practice. Even so, the data shows that the concepts studied by elementary music teachers are incorporated into their teaching significantly more than those that are not studied. Although it is not known if music teachers study techniques that they already prefer, it is known that this sample of music teachers would choose further study of several techniques which they already employ in classroom practice. This sample of music teachers was found to incorporate what they study into their practice.

Additionally, this study found a positive correlation between the desire to study the Orff process in the future and the belief that the study of “the Orff Schulwerk process will increase student achievement in music” (Bernard, 2009, p. 117). A similar positive correlation was found between the desire to study Kodály methods in the future and the belief that the study of Kodály methods would increase student achievement in music. Yet another positive correlation was found between the desire to study behavior management in the future and the belief that the study of behavior management methods would increase student achievement in music. Thus, the respondents in this sample of elementary music teachers do find professional development meaningful.

*Do elementary music teachers believe that content-specific professional development leads to increased student achievement in music?*

NCLB ushered in an era of assessments and accountability. Consequently, student achievement has become a focal point in any serious discussion of PD issues. Furthermore, with the arts named as a core subject by NCLB, music teachers are now tasked with the responsibility to increase student achievement in music. Music teachers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are challenged by higher standards, new technology, and a consumer culture of instant gratification. Specific PD targeted toward the challenges and realities of

the elementary music classroom must figure prominently in future professional learning opportunities.

A review of the research literature indicates that content-specific PD focusing on elementary music student achievement standards is more beneficial for music teachers, thus more beneficial for music students, than general or schoolwide staff development which is predominantly targeted toward meeting the needs of the K-5 classroom teacher. New or innovative ideas, however beneficial or research-based, may not achieve acceptance without extensive discussion and ongoing dialog. This section reveals whether or not music teachers are ready to accept content-specific PD, and what forms of delivery they are ready to undertake.

When questioned about PD activities that are most likely to help increase student achievement in music, respondents in this study overwhelmingly selected “A local best practices sharing session demonstrating music lesson plans and assessments for music classroom use” (Bernard, 2009, p. 108) as the best course of action. As a second choice, respondents favored “Local/state music organization/association conferences” and “A local presentation by a renowned regional or national music educator.” These were followed in popularity by “A university continuing education summer music course” and “National music organization/association conferences.” The items that received significantly the least support for increasing student achievement in music were “District-sponsored general staff development training” and “School-focused staff development focusing on a school-wide topic.” These two items that received so little support are the PD cornerstone of many school improvement plans; this reinforces the need for differentiated PD offerings for elementary music teachers.

To help determine which content-specific topics would be of value to elementary music teachers, respondents were asked to rank several areas using the criteria of “most likely to increase student achievement in music” (Bernard, 2009, p. 110). By far, the topic most often selected was “Teaching the music curriculum/standards in the general music classroom.” Also receiving a significant amount of support were “Assessing students in the general music classroom”; “Orff Schulwerk methods”; “Technology for teaching music”; and “Behavior management in the general music classroom.” Time management, Kodály methods, and Multicultural topics were also of interest to the respondents, but ranked well below the other choices.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback with the survey question, “What other professional development activities are likely to help increase student achievement in music” (Bernard, 2009, p. 112). The extant literature reveals a sense of isolation among music teachers, and that impression was confirmed by many of the current survey responses. Several respondents commented on the need for collaboration with other music teachers, and the desire to familiarize K-5 classroom teachers with the music curriculum. Peer classroom observations were suggested as one manner of achieving these objectives.

The respondents strongly endorsed the importance of a local best practices sharing session demonstrating music lesson plans and assessments for music classroom use, which indicates that this sample of elementary music teachers do believe that content-specific professional development leads to increased student achievement in music. In fact, the responses showed a correlation between the desire for future study of “Teaching the music curriculum/standards in the general music classroom” (Bernard,

2009, p. 118) and the belief that “A local best practices sharing session demonstrating music lesson plans and assessments for music classroom use” would increase student achievement in music. This indicates that elementary music teachers would find value in a local best practices sharing session of lesson plans and assessments based on the music curriculum and music standards.

*Do elementary music teachers believe planning time is necessary for creation and implementation of standards-based lesson plans and assessments?*

The literature indicates that planning time is necessary for creation and implementation of standards-based lesson plans and assessments; that conclusion was reflected by the respondents in this study. Virtually all of the respondents upheld this view. The significance of this research question becomes apparent when elementary music teacher class schedules are considered. Even among neighboring schools there is often a disparity in the availability of planning time for music teachers. This can be caused by numerous factors including high student to music teacher ratio, time/scheduling constraints or irregularities, additional duties outside the music classroom, or a lack of understanding on the part of administrators and schedulers of the necessity of planning time for music teachers. With an ever-increasing emphasis on accountability and student achievement, administrators must be made aware that planning time is a necessity for creation and implementation of standards-based lesson plans and assessments.

*Do elementary music teachers view teacher leadership as a meaningful component of professional development?*

One of the top three reasons chosen by the respondents for engaging in PD activities was “To interact professionally with other music teachers” (Bernard, 2009, p. 92). Professional interaction, both formal and informal, is a primary component of teacher leadership. One means of accomplishing this interaction is through peer sharing sessions. The literature suggests that regularly scheduled long term interactions such as peer sharing sessions or CTSG provide leadership opportunities for the participants as well as opportunities for participants to practice and reflect on new strategies and techniques. Successive meetings can allow for reinforcement and support, leading to assimilation of the new strategies into the participants’ teaching practice.

Subsequently, when asked for a response to the statement, “Regularly scheduled long term peer sharing sessions of best practice lesson plans and assessments would be valuable to me,” (Bernard, 2009, p. 124) over 84% of respondents chose either *agree* or *strongly agree*. This indicates a strong desire on the part of the respondent music teachers to engage in such PD activities. Furthermore, because peer sharing sessions employ teacher leadership through participant-centered activities, and because of the expressed desire of the respondents to participate in such activities, this indicates that teacher leadership is viewed as a meaningful component of PD.

Another means of utilizing teacher leadership is through mentoring. The literature suggests that mentoring is beneficial to both the mentor and protégé, and can help ease the transition for beginning teachers. When asked, “If you had a music teacher as a mentor, did that experience help with your success as a music teacher” (Bernard, 2009, p. 125) the overwhelming reaction from respondents in this study was positive. Again,

because mentoring is an aspect of teacher leadership, and the respondents assigned highly favorable ratings to mentoring, it can be implied that elementary music teachers do view teacher leadership as a meaningful component of professional development.

*Have meaningful professional development opportunities for elementary music teachers become increasingly difficult to attain since being required by NCLB?*

The era of NCLB has prompted the advent of assessments and accountability for students, teachers, school districts, and states. The preponderance of NCLB funding, including PD funding, is tied to increasing math and language arts test scores among at-risk students. In such a climate, arts teachers have expressed concern at the lack of opportunity to participate in music content-specific PD. Respondents in this study expressed concern over a lack of funding to participate in the currently available music content-specific PD opportunities, and the increasing difficulty of obtaining professional release days to attend content-specific PD events, even at personal expense. The majority of respondents, when asked to respond to the statement, “Meaningful music-related professional development opportunities are increasingly difficult to come by since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002,” (Bernard, 2009, p. 126) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. When the responses were disaggregated between respondents from each state, it was found that respondents from Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina were significantly more likely to agree with the statement than those from Florida. This indicates that in Florida, the opportunity for meaningful PD may have undergone less change than in the other states included in the study, while respondents from Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina experienced a significant increase in difficulty attaining meaningful PD. Concomitant with the accountability-driven increase in emphasis on standards and assessment, content specific PD opportunities must be made readily available to elementary music teachers.

*Comparison to Tarnowski and Murphy Study*

In comparing the present study to the Tarnowski and Murphy (2003) findings, the majority of respondents in both studies reported participating in PD centered on the Orff Schulwerk process; no other area was selected over 50% in both surveys. In response to methods incorporated into teaching practice, the majority of respondents in both studies selected standards, multicultural/world music, and technology. Assessment was also incorporated by over 46% of the Tarnowski and Murphy respondents and 69.9% of respondents in the present study. In the current study, only technology and Orff Schulwerk were selected by a majority of respondents as desired for future study, although Kodály methods and assessment received over 40% support. The majority of Tarnowski and Murphy’s respondents indicated that they would choose to participate in the future in Orff Schulwerk, teaching with technology, assessment, and standards-based teaching; Kodály also garnered over 46% support. The correspondence between responses from the Tarnowski and Murphy study and the present study indicate the potential to generalize that elementary music teachers do incorporate many strategies and methods learned from PD into their teaching practice. Furthermore, both studies show a strong desire on the part of elementary music teachers to continue PD studies in Orff Schulwerk, Kodály methods, teaching with technology, standards-based teaching, and assessment. This dictates that PD providers, from local schools through national music

organizations, must make every effort to deliver content-specific PD in these priority areas.

## Recommendations

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Prominent music education researchers have called for future research regarding how music teacher PD affects students. This is important because ultimately, student achievement in music is one of the primary goals of the elementary music teacher. Results from the current study will compliment research on student achievement in the music classroom. Future researchers may wish to conduct a scientific study that compares music student achievement among students whose music teachers participate in differing forms of PD activities or differing modes of PD delivery. In addition to gaining a better understanding of music student achievement, this would take the field a step closer to identifying highly effective means of implementing music teacher PD, and closer to making those innovative models available to school districts nationally. There is also a need for future studies to examine the relationship between elementary music teacher PD and pre-service music teacher education, personal PD plans, PD schools, Lesson Study, and PD partnerships with universities.

This study focused on the self-perceived PD needs of a sample of practicing elementary music educators. Another important future study would compare the wants and needs revealed by the current study to PD needs of individual music teachers as observed by trained music supervisors and administrators. It would be significant to know if the self-perceived PD needs of elementary music teachers align with the observed needs as recognized by trained administrators. A strong negative correlation between self-perceived PD needs and needs observed by administrators would indicate the necessity for research into the incongruity between actual PD needs as opposed to self-perceived needs.

Finally, a logical recommendation for future research is to replicate this study with a sample of elementary music educators from other geographical regions. Replication would provide a degree of generalizability between the findings of this study as compared to the new study. It would be particularly significant because it would help researchers and PD providers gain a better understanding of music educators' acceptance and support of content-specific PD and teacher leadership strategies as a means of PD.

### *Recommendation for Practice*

1. Providers of PD for elementary music teachers must focus on pragmatic, music standards-based content centered on increasing student achievement in the general music classroom. Hundreds of respondents in this study overwhelmingly stated that they engage in PD to increase their knowledge and skills, and to increase student achievement in the general music classroom. These music teachers want to know how to better teach the music curriculum and standards in the music classroom, and how to efficiently assess student learning. This need cannot be ignored.
2. Funding and adequate resources must be provided for elementary music teacher PD. One of the primary themes that emerged from comments by the respondents

was a lack of funding to attend music content-specific PD events. The elementary music teachers reported a great deal of self-funding to attend PD activities. Although teacher leadership strategies provide economical methods of providing local PD, funding must be secured for elementary music specialists to attend local, state, and national music association conferences. Local, state, and federal agencies must collaborate to implement lasting educational reforms that will ensure this funding in order to provide meaningful PD, highly qualified teachers, and increased student achievement in music.

3. Administrators and schedulers must be made aware that adequate planning time is necessary for the creation and implementation of standards-based lesson plans and assessments. In this era of NCLB standards and accountability, elementary music teachers are focused on increasing student achievement in music. However, student achievement will not increase without adequate time to assess the current functioning of the students, craft a plan to improve that status, implement the plan, and then evaluate and reflect on the results. As the adage says, “When you fail to plan you plan to fail.”
4. Local school districts have the opportunity to cultivate teacher leadership as a means of providing meaningful PD. Respondents in this study commented on the need for more interaction with other elementary music teachers including observing, mentoring, and peer coaching. They also commented that there is a lack of local content-specific PD, and made clear their frustration at the inefficiency of being required to attend training in disciplines outside the content area of music. Local school districts must provide a solution to these issues by implementing regularly scheduled long term peer sharing sessions of best practice lesson plans and assessments and by promoting other teacher leadership strategies.
5. Schools of music education must focus on recruitment and retention of K-5 music teachers due to the impending attrition over the next decade. Over half of the respondents indicated that they plan to remain an elementary music teacher for fewer than 11 more years. Music educators at every level are responsible for training and nurturing the music teachers of the future. However, the current situation necessitates that university music faculty make a priority of bolstering the ranks of future elementary music teachers.
6. Schools of music education must focus on providing practical knowledge to prepare the music teachers of the future. Theory and philosophy certainly have an important place in the future of music education; however, elementary music educators are clamoring for practical methods such as Orff Schulwerk and Kodály that can immediately be implemented in the music classroom to increase music student achievement. The elementary music teachers participating in this study also expressed a great desire to study technology for teaching music, and to learn how to better assess music students.

## Implications

Prior to this study, the PD wants and needs of elementary music educators were not known. The respondents in this study provided valuable insight into the PD wants and needs of elementary music teachers, including content-specific PD, planning time, teacher leadership, activities that are believed to contribute to music student achievement, activities that are incorporated into classroom instruction, and the impact of NCLB on music educator PD. The respondents strongly supported content-specific PD while finding general school PD less meaningful. The sample viewed teacher-led PD as meaningful, particularly in reference to music standards and assessments. Finally, the elementary music teachers affirmed the importance of planning time in creating and implementing standards-based music lesson plans and assessments, and expressed concern over the impact of NCLB on music teacher PD.

Research in elementary music educator PD shows the necessity for content-specific PD centered on the needs of the elementary music teacher rather than general or schoolwide PD targeted toward the needs of the K-5 classroom teacher. Distinguished music education researchers encourage additional research to provide generalizability between findings. The field of music educator PD research is in its infancy, therefore additional studies must be undertaken to fill in the knowledge gaps.

## Conclusion

This study attempted to synthesize the literature on PD, planning time, teacher leadership, and NCLB in order to provide a unique and comprehensive depiction of the current state of elementary music teacher PD. Building on the research of Bowles, Bush, Conway, Friedrichs and many others, this study proposes progressive recommendations for scholarship and practice. The recommendations for future research reinforce the existing recommendations by noted researchers while proposing new avenues of questioning. The recommendations for practice integrate suggestions from the literature with findings from the current study to create new proposals for future practice.

The primary purpose of this cross-sectional descriptive study was to investigate elementary music teacher PD activities, to determine what motivates elementary music teachers to participate in those activities, and to discover what activities elementary music teachers desire for future PD in the context of maintaining highly qualified status under NCLB and increasing student achievement. This study expands the knowledge base by establishing common ground concerning the PD needs and wants of elementary music teachers. These needs and desires must drive PD offerings. PD driven by convenience or a lack of preparation squanders valuable time and resources.

Meaningful PD can be thought of as a continuum, with teachers shifting their knowledge and skills from where they are to where they need to be in an effort to better increase student achievement. Every teacher has a different starting point, and stands at a different position along this continuum. Each teacher's PD needs are based on student population needs, personal interests, prior learning, and life experiences. Thus what is meaningful to one teacher may be of little value to another.

Elementary music teachers participate in many PD activities. The results of this study show that elementary music teachers believe that PD should be content-specific and performance based. PD that is not related to the music curriculum is often viewed by these teachers as irrelevant and not meaningful. Meaningful PD must focus on the

curricular standards for which the music teacher is responsible. Local school administrators must assure that schoolwide PD experiences are differentiated to meet the needs of elementary music teachers. The respondents in this study affirmed the findings of Friedrichs (2001), Bush (2007), Conway (2008) and others that sharing best practices among music colleagues, thus practicing teacher leadership, is viewed as an effective means of achieving PD goals and thereby increasing student achievement.

Elementary music teacher PD research is a fundamental area of need. The results of this study have the potential to improve PD offerings for elementary music educators by helping PD providers understand the needs and desires of elementary music educators. Findings from the present study add to the existing body of knowledge and help to bring focus to the understanding of elementary music teacher PD needs and wants. In this context, findings from this study help illuminate the current state of elementary music teacher PD, what offerings music educators deem are needed, and what delivery models are preferred. The challenge before us is to implement these recommendations.

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