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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine California preservice teachers' experiences and beliefs with music and music integration in elementary school settings. Preservice elementary teachers (N = 149), currently pursuing a Liberal Studies degree at one of several universities in California, consisted of the participants in this investigation. Results indicated participants agreed that an elementary classroom teacher should integrate content from music class into other subjects, while also reflecting a significant association between participants' year in school and their agreement that an elementary general music teacher should integrate other subject area content. Results also indicated a significant association between participants' year in school and their agreement that an elementary general classroom teacher should be capable of teaching music; however, they agreed that music should be taught by a certified music educator. Participants also ranked helping students develop self-esteem or confidence and building social skills as the most important outcomes of an elementary general music classroom, while also strongly agreeing that music supports academic achievement in other subject areas.

Keywords

music integration, elementary education, preservice teachers, music education

In elementary schools without a credentialed music teacher, elementary general classroom teachers are often relied upon to teach music both discretely and in an integrated manner. Although their levels of expertise may vary, elementary teachers are authorized to teach the arts under their credential (California Department of Education, 2022). According to the *Public Elementary and Secondary School Arts Education Instructors* report, Sparks et al. (2015) discovered that Pacific Coast states lean heavily on teachers in elementary general classrooms for music teaching and music integration. Thus, those teaching future educators might find benefit in gaining an understanding

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of preservice teachers' experiences and beliefs pertaining to teaching music and integrating music into elementary general classrooms to develop course content that will be practically applicable for preservice teachers' future classrooms (Morin, 2004).

Integrating music falls under the umbrella of arts integration, a practice in which teachers approach the integration of the identified arts (e.g., music, visual arts, dance, theater) and other content areas (e.g., language arts, science, mathematics, history-social science) equally in the instructional design, implementation, and assessment of students' learning (California Department of Education, 2022; Silverstein & Layne, 2020). There are three types of arts integration, including multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary arts integration (Drake & Burns, 2004). Multidisciplinary arts integration focuses on connecting a theme common to all disciplines in which learning goals, assessments, and instructions are aligned with content standards. Interdisciplinary arts integration links common learning across disciplines, and teachers focus on concepts that transfer across lessons. Finally, transdisciplinary arts integration focuses on students' questions and acquisitions of life skills, where students gain experiences from essential understanding across disciplines (Drake & Burns, 2004). Additionally, Taylor (2014) suggested that creating enriching and affirming learning environments, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, challenging and relevant curriculum, high-quality instructional resources, preparation, and support are all core principles of arts integration. Furthermore, arts integration augments students' learning in the arts and other subject areas; however, arts integration should not replace discrete arts education (Hardiman et al., 2019).

For those teaching in general elementary classrooms, "a key to the success of arts integration learning at the elementary level is ensuring all educators designing the instruction are supported through professional learning that addresses their needs" (California Arts Education Framework, 2021, p. 14). Throughout the California Department of Education (2018) meetings regarding revisions of the *Visual and Performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools*, participants described how the *California Arts Education Framework* could support multiple subject credential teachers (e.g., elementary general classroom teachers) in designing and implementing instruction for arts integration. They noted that these teachers desired a better understanding of why arts integration should be included in general classroom instruction and how the framework should differentiate between arts-integrated and arts-enhanced lessons. Additionally, focus group participants asked that the *California Arts Education Framework* include methods in which arts teachers can assist with arts integration by collaborating with non-arts teachers on core concepts and subjects (California Department of Education, 2018).

Researchers (Hipp & Sulentic, 2019; Miksza & Gault, 2014; Neokleous, 2013; Propst, 2003) have found that in-service elementary classroom teachers might be more willing to integrate music into their general classrooms when they have more opportunities to learn about the music integration process, as many implement music in their classrooms for multiple uses from transitions to musical appreciation (Abril &

Gault, 2005). Colwell (2008) discovered that elementary classroom teachers gained comfort with teaching music and music integration over time, while Holden and Button (2006) explored elementary teachers' confidence in teaching music and discovered that the participants felt their teacher education programs did not instruct them to teach music effectively and believed they required greater knowledge to increase their confidence. Specifically, elementary general classroom teachers could integrate music through a song that is also connected with language arts to reinforce vowel sounds (e.g., *Apples and Bananas*), utilize notation to represent mathematical patterns, or teach piggyback songs to enhance memorization (Campbell et al., 2017; Sarrazin, 2016).

In terms of integrating music into their future classrooms, preservice elementary teachers appear to feel uncertain (Della Pietra, Bidner, & Devaney, 2010; Hash, 2010; Hipp & Sulentic, 2019), lack confidence (Burak, 2019), and have little preparation (Barrett et al., 2019). Those beliefs and perspectives could negatively impact student learning if not expanded during preservice teacher education programs (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Hennessy (2000) analyzed the confidence of preservice elementary teachers who were teaching the arts and found that music was lowest in terms of their confidence levels, and participants also believed that one needs to be an accomplished performer to effectively teach music. Seddon and Biasutti (2008) explored preservice elementary teachers' confidence in teaching music, and found that confidence increased as a result of developing their aural skills in music. Perhaps challenging preservice teachers' beliefs might avail some of their frustrations and misgivings about teaching music (Battersby & Cave, 2014).

Vannatta-Hall (2010) found that early childhood preservice teachers ($N = 41$) enrolled in a music methods course significantly increased their confidence at the end of four peer teaching sessions. Berke and Colwell (2004) studied preservice elementary teachers' ($N = 34$) musical abilities, attitudes about music, and their perceptions of music integration in the elementary classroom. The results indicated a positive change in their musical abilities and attitudes over the course of a university music integration course. Valerio and Freeman (2009) compared preservice early childhood and elementary education in-service teachers' experiences teaching music in their university's music methods courses and found that they felt more confident in their musical abilities and music teaching abilities as a result of that preparation.

According to Potter (2022), in a pretest-posttest study spanning the duration of a semester-long online music integration course, preservice elementary teachers ($N = 93$) significantly increased their level of agreement that elementary general classroom teachers should integrate music content into their classrooms and that an elementary general classroom teacher should be capable of teaching music. There was also a significant increase in participants' level of agreement with respect to acting as the music teacher in an elementary school setting. Perhaps preservice teachers' involvement in a semester-long music integration course bolstered their confidence both in terms of comfort with music and with the idea of music integration. In a similar study, Biasutti et al. (2015) examined general preservice teachers' ($N = 23$) confidence as a result of

their participation in a program designed to develop competencies for teaching music in elementary school settings. The results indicated that learner-focused teaching methods improved participants' attitudes toward teaching music, and there was a significant improvement in their confidence from the beginning to the end of the program.

In gaining an understanding of where preservice teachers need more support to build comfort and confidence integrating music into their future classrooms, the field of education might also have more artistically prepared teachers entering the profession. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine California preservice teachers' experiences and beliefs with music and music integration in elementary school settings. In this investigation, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are preservice teachers' level of agreement pertaining to the roles of the elementary classroom and elementary general music teacher?
2. What are preservice teachers' level of agreement pertaining to integrating music within other subjects in the elementary classroom?
3. How do preservice teachers rank different outcomes in the elementary music classroom?
4. How do preservice teachers rank the importance of music in relation to other subjects in the elementary classroom?

METHOD

I utilized a survey for this descriptive study to examine California preservice teachers' experiences and beliefs with music and music integration in elementary school settings. I designed this investigation for preservice teachers pursuing a Liberal Studies degree at one of several state university campuses in California. The study took place during the Fall 2021 semester.

Participants

The host university's human subjects committee granted me permission to conduct this investigation. I targeted participants currently enrolled in a Liberal Studies degree program within a state university system, comprising 22 individual campuses, in California. To recruit potential participants, I emailed Liberal Studies directors at all campuses included in the system to request their participation and distribution of the questionnaire. I also emailed music integration course instructors at those same campuses to directly recruit potential participants for the study.

I received responses from 11 campuses in the statewide university system, and a total of 149 preservice teachers volunteered to take part in the study. Participants read and signed a consent form, according to my university's requirements, prior to the launch of the investigation. Participants identified as male ($n = 12$; 8.0%), female ($n = 134$; 89.9%), non-binary ($n = 2$; 1.3%), and preferred not to say ($n = 1$; .7%). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 53 years of age ($M = 24.23$ years; $SD = 7.38$ years) and consisted of freshman ($n = 16$; 10.7%), sophomores ($n = 9$; 6.0%), juniors ($n = 61$;

40.9%), seniors ($n = 37$; 24.8%), and other ($n = 26$; 17.4%). The “other” category included those in the teaching credential program ($n = 20$) and graduate students ($n = 6$). The participants also included those self-identified as transfer students ($n = 64$; 42.9%).

Most of the participants’ university degree programs offered a music integration course ($n = 110$; 73.8%) in the following modalities for Fall 2021: in-person ($n = 80$; 53.7%), virtual ($n = 29$; 19.5%), hybrid ($n = 13$; 8.7%), and did not know ($n = 27$; 18.1%). At the time of the questionnaire’s completion, participants’ status in their university’s music integration course included previously completed ($n = 38$; 25.5%), currently enrolled ($n = 71$; 47.6%), and not completed ($n = 40$; 26.8%).

Pertaining to prior teaching experience in an early childhood or elementary music classroom, participants reported no experience ($n = 80$; 53.7%), very limited experience ($n = 27$; 18.1%), some experience ($n = 21$; 14.1%), moderate experience ($n = 13$; 8.7%), or extensive experience ($n = 3$; 2.0%). A few participants ($n = 5$) did not respond to this prompt. Participants reported that these music teaching experiences included observations, assisting credentialed teachers, and volunteering in elementary classrooms.

Participants also reported prior teaching experience in an early childhood or elementary preschool to fifth-grade general classroom. Participants reported no experience ($n = 41$; 27.5%), very limited experience ($n = 20$; 13.4%), some experience ($n = 30$; 20.1%), moderate experience ($n = 36$; 24.2%), or extensive experience ($n = 12$; 8.1%). Ten participants did not provide a response to this question. These elementary general classroom experiences included teaching in a before/after school program, working in a childcare setting, assisting credentialed teachers, teaching in early field experiences, and teaching as a substitute. Participants reported formal music instruction of none ($n = 91$; 61.1%), one year ($n = 15$; 10.1%), two years ($n = 12$; 8.1%), three years ($n = 10$; 6.7%), four years ($n = 5$; 3.4%), and over five years ($n = 16$; 10.7%) in band, choir, orchestra, piano, private lessons, and music theater. Participants shared their experiences playing an instrument ($n = 48$; 32.2%), such as alto saxophone, clarinet, percussion, flute, guitar, ukulele, oboe, cello, recorder, and violin.

Survey Instrument

I utilized an updated version of a survey instrument from a prior investigation (Hash, 2010; Potter, 2022). Previously, I conducted a study (Potter, 2022) with three semester-long sections of an online music integration course at a university in Southern California for elementary general classroom preservice teachers. I focused on preservice teachers’ level of comfort and confidence with music integration, and the results indicated that preservice teachers felt uncomfortable with many aspects of teaching music (i.e., using their singing voice, teaching a song) and did not feel confident integrating music into other subjects such as math, language arts, history-social science, and science. Thus, I aimed to conduct a large-scale study that could provide valuable insight as to preservice elementary teachers’ experience with and beliefs pertaining to

music integration and their comfort teaching such content, specifically in California, where teachers are heavily relied upon to teach music and integrate music into their elementary general classrooms.

Three music education faculty reviewed the survey and established its content validity. Hash (2010) established internal reliability for sections three, four, and five of the survey as measured by Cronbach's alpha. Results indicated a coefficient alpha of .75 for section three (teaching and comfort with integration), .82 for section four (importance of subjects), and .85 for section five (importance of musical outcomes). I also piloted the questionnaire at two small universities in Southern California in May 2021. After analyzing the results from the pilot study, I added questions regarding the current modality of the music integration course (e.g., in-person, online, hybrid) and if participants had or had not completed a music integration course at their respective university.

The survey instrument included 31 questions. These prompts consisted of six sections: demographic information (11 items; section one), prior experience with music (8 items; section two), teaching music and comfort with music in the elementary classroom (9 items; section three), the importance of music as related to other subjects in the elementary classroom (1 item; section four), the importance of musical outcomes in an elementary setting (1 item; section five), and one open-ended response about music integration in an elementary classroom (section six). A 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) or 1 (*very unimportant*) to 7 (*very important*) was used for participants' responses. Survey items included prompts such as: *I feel comfortable using my singing voice in front of others; I would feel comfortable integrating music with other subjects (e.g., math, science, history-social science, language arts) in an elementary classroom; An elementary classroom teacher should be capable of teaching music; and music should be taught by a teacher certified in music education.*

Procedure

I distributed the questionnaire via *Qualtrics* during the first four weeks of classes of the Fall 2021 semester to Liberal Studies coordinators and music integration course instructors throughout the 22 campuses belonging to a state university system in California. The email included a study invitation, purpose statement, estimated questionnaire completion time, and online survey link. I utilized the anonymous survey link generated through *Qualtrics* to avoid collecting any identifying participant data. The questionnaire took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

Within the statewide university system, the Liberal Studies major is a pre-professional program, which can lead to a career in K-8 teaching in the areas of general, special, and bilingual education (SDSU School of Teacher Education, 2021). Music integration courses at the respective universities included descriptions such as: *Analytical study of music suitable for children of all ages; class activities will include singing, movement, listening, playing classroom instruments, and musical composition; and development of fundamentals and*

principles for selecting, evaluating and performing music literature for children grades K-6; and the place of music in the child's education.

Analysis

I analyzed the data using SPSS 27.0 and computed descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. I also conducted chi-square tests with reference to the Likert-scale data and various categorical data points.

Limitations

This investigation focused on the beliefs and experiences of preservice elementary education students across various campuses within a state-wide university system. Not all Liberal Studies degree programs are identical. In addition, instructors of music integration classes covered similar material; however, that content was likely addressed in differing pedagogical approaches and methods. Furthermore, given the constraints of conducting this research during the COVID-19 pandemic, not all music integration courses were taught in the same modality (e.g., in-person, online, hybrid). Additionally, the participants entered this study at various points within their degree programs, differed in their enrollment in a music integration course, and possessed varying levels of musical knowledge and abilities. The results may not be generalizable to all preservice teachers, and the reader might use caution when interpreting the findings of the study.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What are preservice teachers' level of agreement pertaining to the roles of the elementary classroom and elementary general music teacher?

After completing the demographic information portion of the questionnaire, participants indicated their level of agreement on statements regarding the roles of the elementary classroom teacher and elementary general music teachers on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants' level of agreement varied in terms of whether an elementary classroom teacher should be capable of teaching music from "neither disagree nor agree" ($n = 21$; 14.1%) to "somewhat agree" ($n = 45$; 30.2%) to "strongly agree" ($n = 15$; 10.0%). A chi-square test of independence showed a significant association between participants' year in school (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) and their level of agreement that an elementary classroom teacher should be capable of teaching music, $X^2(24, N = 149) = 46.27, p = .00$. However, they agreed that music should be taught by a teacher certified in music education ($n = 65$; 43.6%).

In the next section of the questionnaire, participants responded to prompts regarding teaching music on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants did not appear to feel comfortable using their singing voice in front of others as indicated by their responses of "strongly disagree" ($n = 28$; 18.8%) and "disagree" ($n = 24$; 16.1%). The responses for feeling comfortable acting as the music teacher in an elementary classroom ranged from "strongly disagree" ($n = 19$; 12.8%) to

“disagree” ($n = 23$; 15.4%) to “somewhat agree” ($n = 27$; 18.1%). A chi-square test of independence showed a significant association between modality of music integration course (e.g., in-person, virtual, hybrid) and comfort acting as the music teacher, $X^2(18, N = 149) = 69.65, p = .00$. Participants seemed to be comfortable ($n = 69$; 46.3%) integrating music with other subjects (e.g., math, language arts, science, history-social science) in an elementary classroom.

Research Question Two: What are preservice teachers' level of agreement pertaining to integrating music within other subjects in the elementary classroom?

Participants agreed ($n = 93$; 62.4%) that an elementary classroom teacher should integrate content from music class into other subjects (e.g., math, language arts, science, history-social science). A chi-square test of independence showed a significant association between participants' enrollment (e.g., previously enrolled, currently enrolled, not completed) in a music integration course and their agreement regarding integrating content from music class into other subjects, $X^2(10, N = 149) = 19.88, p = .03$.

Results also indicated that participants agreed ($n = 79$; 53.0 %) that a general elementary music teacher should integrate content from other subjects (e.g., math, language arts, science, history-social science) into music instruction. A chi-square test of independence indicated a significant association between participants' year in school (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) and their agreement that an elementary general music teacher should integrate content from other subject areas, $X^2(24, N = 149) = 40.23, p = .02$. A chi-square test of independence indicated a significant association between participants' status as a transfer student and an elementary general music teacher integrating content from other subject areas, $X^2(12, N = 149) = 27.37, p = .00$.

Research Question Three: How do preservice teachers rank different outcomes in elementary music classrooms?

Participants ranked, among 15 musical outcomes in an elementary general music classroom, helping students develop self-esteem or confidence ($n = 113$; 75.8%) and building social skills ($n = 109$; 73.2%) as the most important. Participants also strongly agreed that music study can improve student achievement (e.g., memorizing a song, connecting concepts between subject areas) in other subjects ($n = 66$; 44.3%). A chi-square test of independence showed a significant association between participants' year in school (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) and their agreement that music study can improve student achievement in other subjects, $X^2(20, N = 149) = 32.23, p = .04$.

Research Question Four: How do preservice teachers rank the importance of music in relation to other subjects in the elementary classroom?

In the last part of the questionnaire, participants ranked the importance of 13 subjects in the elementary classroom on a scale from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 7 (*very*

important). Participants ranked Health ($n = 75$; 50.3%), English Language Arts ($n = 91$; 60.1%), and Mathematics ($n = 75$; 50.3%) as the most important subjects, while rating Music as “important” ($n = 56$; 37.6%). Theater ($n = 51$; 34.2%) and Media Arts ($n = 48$; 32.2%) were ranked as “somewhat important.”

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine California preservice teachers’ experiences and beliefs with music and music integration in elementary school settings. While participants appeared to feel comfortable integrating music with subjects in the elementary classroom, they were not as comfortable using their singing voice or acting as the music teacher. There seemed to be a relationship between participants’ year in school and their agreement that an elementary classroom teacher should be capable of teaching music; however, they strongly agreed that music should be taught by a certified music teacher. Lastly, participants appeared to value the social and emotional outcomes in elementary general music classrooms above others.

Similar to other findings, participants agreed that an elementary general classroom teacher should have the capabilities to teach and integrate music (Hash, 2010; Potter, 2022; Propst, 2003). Given the significant relationship between preservice teachers’ year in school and their agreement on this topic, it could be that experiences, such as their participation in a music integration course at their respective university, positively impacted their beliefs (e.g., Colwell, 2008). However, participants also agreed that music should be taught by a credentialed music teacher. This is consistent with Potter’s (2022) previous findings of a significant increase in preservice elementary teachers’ agreement, over the span of their participation in an online music integration course, that music instruction should be facilitated by a credentialed music educator. Further research could examine the experiences and beliefs of preservice teachers from various locations within the United States.

In terms of their experiences and beliefs pertaining to music, participants did not appear to be comfortable using their singing voice in front of others. Consistent with results from a study with three online music integration courses (Potter, 2022), participants’ comfort with singing significantly decreased throughout their participation in the music integration course. Perhaps preservice teachers need more opportunities to use their singing voice in a classroom setting or in peer teaching experiences to build their comfort and confidence. In order to address this discomfort and potential fear, working with preservice teachers’ preconceived ideas about their musical abilities—or perhaps negative experiences—from elementary school aids in breaking through those anxieties and trepidation (Stuart & Thurlow, 2000).

Participants did not appear to be comfortable acting as the music teacher, which others (Burak, 2019; Hash, 2010) have found, as well. However, there was a relationship between the modality (e.g., in-person, hybrid, online) of the music integration course and that comfort. Potentially, those who had experiences in-person were allotted more experiences with teaching music than in an online setting, which could add challenges

for music-making activities. The more opportunities preservice educators have to teach, explore, and integrate music, the more likely they will improve (Siebenaler, 2006; Vannatta-Hall, 2010). A future study could examine the specific experiences within in-person, online, and hybrid music integration courses and their relationships to preservice teachers' comfort and confidence in teaching and integrating music.

Participants appeared to be comfortable with integrating music with other subjects (e.g., math, science, history-social science, language arts), which is consistent with other findings (Miksza & Gault, 2014; Potter, 2022). Another study indicated that, despite the lack of formal music training, elementary in-service educators viewed music integration positively (Barrett et al., 2019). There also appeared to be a significant relationship between participants' enrollment in a music integration course and their level of comfort with integrating music into their elementary general classroom. Perhaps these types of courses provide opportunities for students to build confidence in their music integration abilities (e.g., Hipp & Sulentic, 2019; Potter, 2022). Preservice teachers might also benefit from activities in their coursework, which are learner-focused where they can assess their own comfort and confidence with teaching and integrating music, while also identifying creative ways to weave musical activities into their future classrooms. A future study could explore the comfort of those currently teaching in an elementary classroom to determine if a music integration course could have played a role in their level of music teaching and/or music integration in their current classroom.

As far as participants' rankings of the outcomes in an elementary general music classroom, the top-ranked items fell under social and emotional learning (e.g., developing self-esteem, building social skills); however, participants strongly agreed that the study of music can improve achievement in other subjects. In contrast, in a previous study (Potter, 2022), participants' rankings significantly increased over the course of their participation in an online music integration course in terms of academically focused outcomes (e.g., supporting reading and writing instruction and analyzing and describing music) in an elementary general music classroom. Recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, could have impacted preservice teachers' beliefs about music and its role in an elementary school. A future study could examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on preservice and in-service teachers' beliefs about the role of music in our schools.

CONCLUSION

The preservice teachers involved in this study seemed to have positive views of music and music integration in elementary school settings. Participants supported music integration within other subjects, while also sharing a level of discomfort acting as the music teacher. As these teachers progress throughout their degree programs, it could be beneficial for them to understand the value of music, especially as it is a federally recognized subject with state and national standards, given that general classroom teachers are often the sole source of music for some elementary students.

This research could help those in higher education find more practical ways to provide experiences for future elementary general classroom teachers to explore and experiment with music teaching in classrooms. For example, teacher educators might focus attention on musical concepts and in-class learning activities that preservice elementary educators might actually use in their future classrooms (Propst, 2003). Such experiences could include field observations of in-service elementary general classroom teachers who are actively integrating music into their instruction, multiple peer teaching experiences within university music integration courses, opportunities to build support through peer discussions, professional development workshops, or cross-department teacher “buddies” between music education and elementary education majors. Perhaps future elementary educators would benefit from these types of opportunities carefully woven into the music integration course curriculum to help boost confidence and bring attention to the abilities they have to integrate music into their own classroom teaching.

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