

Inclusion in Elementary Music Classrooms

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This research explores inclusion in the elementary music classroom. Three themes were identified: teacher perceptions, teacher experiences in special education, and student learning/behavior and strategies for instruction. The paper goes on to examine how practices at an elementary school could be aligned with research and then explores implications for future research and transformed practice.

Keywords: inclusion, elementary classrooms, music education, students with disabilities

Inclusion in Elementary Music Classrooms

This research is focused on inclusion in the elementary music classroom. For this project inclusive education refers to the inclusion of students with disabilities receiving education alongside their non-disabled peers.

Context

In the United States, students with disabilities who have undergone an evaluation process and are determined to be adversely impacted by general education are given an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to support them. IEPs can include accommodations, specialized instruction, and other services therapists, speech-language pathologists, and nurses provide. At an elementary school located in Washington State, students with IEPs are taught in the general classroom setting with non-disabled peers with additional pull-out services dependent on their IEP. Regarding library, physical education, and music, students with IEPs are taught alongside their non-disabled peers. No music class is explicitly left for students with or without IEPs at this school. Inclusive elementary music classrooms, as just described, can be found throughout Washington state, the United States, and in other countries such as China. However, this classroom format of including students with IEPs with their same-aged, non-disabled peers is not reflected in all schools in Washington State and the United States. On the other end of the spectrum, many schools have adaptive music classrooms where students with IEPs are not given music instruction alongside students without IEPs. Many variations between these two types of music classrooms can be found, including having students with IEPs who received all their instruction in self-contained classrooms come to inclusion during music instruction.

Including students with disabilities in public education is a cornerstone of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Section 1412(a)(5) (Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act, 2004) states that students with disabilities are given the right to the least restrictive environment (LRE) or that students with disabilities are educated alongside children who are non-disabled. All other placements in which students with disabilities are taught away from their non-disabled peers only occur when the nature of a student's disability inhibits their ability to achieve satisfactory education in the regular classroom with the addition of supplementary aids and services, such as accommodations, modifications, and specialized instruction.

These aids and services can be provided by the classroom teacher, special education teacher, therapists, paraprofessionals, and other qualified staff. Other teachers and qualified staff include specialist teachers such as physical education teachers, librarians, art teachers, and music teachers. Unlike secondary schools, where music is offered as an elective, elementary music teachers teach all students there. This means that elementary teachers teach all students with disabilities and many in the general music classes alongside non-disabled peers. In the November 2022 Annual Federal Child Count data for the state of Washington, there were a reported 73,439 students, ages 5-11, who have IEPs (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.). Under federal law, the elementary music educator is responsible for providing the appropriate aids and services to their generalized instruction inside the inclusive music classroom.

Importance

As the music teacher at an elementary school in Washington State, I support a variety of student disabilities related to speech, learning disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder, emotional and behavioral disorders, mobility impairments, and more. Each class I teach has a student with an IEP. Further, except for the Transitional Kindergarten class (ages 4-5) and one of two Kindergarten classes (ages 5-6), each class has a mixture of disabilities, and no two IEPs,

adhering to the individualized aspect, are the same. As a result, each class requires significant planning to meet the accommodations and modifications for each student with IEPs. As a music educator who only teaches in music classes part time and the remaining in MTSS push-in, I have a less significant population of students with IEPs than other elementary music educators.

My job is to build a supportive classroom environment where students with disabilities feel safe around their peers. That job requires a great deal of skill and knowledge, especially considering the number of factors that impact the school's culture. A personal example of a factor that impacts the level of support in my inclusive music classroom is interrelation history. I am a first-year teacher in this school, teaching a 3rd-grade student with Autism Spectrum Disorder. This student is intelligent and is on grade level in reading. He enjoys talking about history, anthropology, and geography. Despite his academic strengths and motivations, he struggles to build positive social relationships with his peers. During instructional time, he blurts, over the instructor and his peers, with comments that can be offensive and/or related to current topics he has heard of, such as illegal immigration at the border. Additionally, he has had several situations where he has inappropriately touched himself and his peers. This student faces more challenges in periods of unstructured time, such as lunch and recess. Due to this ongoing history happening for years before my hire, the classroom environment is often less than calm. I do my best to set up positive interventions to mediate positive interactions between him and his classmates. An example was during a whole group bucket drumming lesson when he blurted out repeatedly about Africans. Several students glared at him for making comments and took offense, as we have a student from Ethiopia in our class. I understood he was trying to make an inference that the bucket drumming reminded him of Senegalese drumming, and I stopped the instruction to reword his inference for him to the class so that they could better understand. Despite these

occasional situations, his blurting out is only sometimes informative, yet interrupts the pace of the lesson. This example and many others highlight music educators' challenges when building supportive, inclusive classrooms.

For students with IEPs, this topic is important because a successful inclusive music classroom fulfills the student's legal right to the least restrictive environment, as stated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. For students without IEPs, being taught to hold positive interactions with students with disabilities builds empathy. For communities, inclusive music classrooms can be a place for disability advocacy where families who have students with IEPs can engage in families who have students without IEPs.

Purpose

Successful inclusive education in the elementary music classroom is more than just placing students with disabilities in a music class with their non-disabled peers. It requires music educators' knowledge and efficacy in supporting students with disabilities. The purpose of this project was to better inform elementary music educators on the components of inclusive music education to support students with disabilities. Components include an understanding of all the personnel needed to support an inclusive music classroom, instructional strategies to support student learning, and a working knowledge of the IEP process and the elementary music educator's role in that process.

Focal Questions

The focal questions for this research are:

1. What practices are elementary music teachers using in inclusive classrooms using to support students with IEPs in inclusive elementary music classrooms and what instructional strategies has research found effective?

2. What goals are identified for students with IEPs in the inclusive music classroom?
3. What ways are elementary music teachers collaborating with parents and families to support students with IEPs in inclusive music settings?

Literature Review

This paper examines the research on inclusive elementary music classrooms. Research of mainstreaming, a previous term used for inclusion of students with IEPs in general elementary classrooms, has been a focus since implementing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, reauthorized and renamed to IDEA in 1990. Since the most recent reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, the focus of on inclusion was renewed once again. Three themes have emerged from research on this topic since the turn of the century. The first theme is teacher perceptions of the students with IEPs, the effectiveness of inclusion, and the factors that impact teachers' perceptions. The second theme is the elementary music teacher's experience in special education, namely the IEP team. The IEP team is composed of the special education team, parents, administrators, and students. Research on the second theme focuses on how the elementary music teacher participates in the IEP development process and their collaboration with other stakeholders. The third theme focuses on student learning, behavior, and strategies that impact student outcomes.

Teacher Perceptions

With the addition of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, researchers were interested in the effectiveness of mainstreaming through the eyes of educators. Since reauthorization of IDEA in 1990 with a change in policy and terminology, researchers have been interested in whether there was a change in elementary music educators' perceptions toward the

impact of inclusion on stakeholders, perceptions of learning potential of students with disabilities, and factors that affect efficacy in implementing inclusion.

Teacher Perceptions on Inclusion

To some, arts education is a crucial part of inclusion for a school. This may be a reason why even students who are taught core-subjects in self-contained classrooms are given inclusion during music class with their same-aged non-disabled peers. However, inclusion is not beneficial for students with disabilities solely based on the presence of arts education with proximity to their non-disabled peers (Yinger et al. 2022). Researchers have stated that teacher attitudes directly affect all students' success in any classroom (Brown et al., 2023; Draper et al., 2019). For this claim, it has been important to research elementary music teacher perceptions on inclusion and self-efficacy in supporting students with IEPs.

In a 2007 survey of elementary music teachers indicated that inclusion had a positive effect on teachers and students with disabilities (Scott et al., 2007). A survey study (VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014), adapted from a 1990 survey on teacher perceptions on inclusion in the music classroom (Gfeller et al., 1990), found that students with disabilities were being integrated effectively, had the exact expectations as nondisabled peers, and their needs were being met. Half of the teachers reported feeling comfortable modifying and adapting the regular music curriculum for students with disabilities. However, these percentages were lower when broken into specific disability categories: deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, intellectual ability, and multiple disabilities. Authors of a 2023 study (Brown et al., 2023) found that of the elementary music teachers who participated, less than half responded that they were "moderately confident" in teaching students with ASD in a regular music classroom. A minority of teachers in

in 2010 survey also reported their skills in accommodating meeting the needs of students (McCord & Watts, 2010).

Factors of Teacher Efficacy

In addition to a focus on elementary music teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, researchers sought factors that affect their attitudes. One variable that researchers found to positively change their perception towards inclusion and their implementation of it was pre-service coursework and in-service training (Cowell, 2012; Hammel & Gerrity, 2012; Pino, 2022; Salvador, 2015). Though authors agree that pre-service coursework positively changed elementary music teachers' perceptions and increase their efficacy in implementing inclusion in their classrooms, the varying topics and types of coursework determine beneficial outcomes it had on teachers. Colwell (2012) developed an undergraduate course for pre-service music educators and student music therapists that included a disability simulation assignment. Using the pretest-posttest questionnaire developed from two previous questionnaires on mainstreaming, Colwell sought to find the impact of the assignment on teacher attitudes towards working with students with IEP in the general education setting. The result was that students showed an improved positive attitude between the pre-and posttest. Student reflection comments after the course included challenging their expectations of what tasks would be and would not be difficult to complete. Coursework and training that have teachers reflecting on the impact of varying disabilities heighten teachers' empathy for students with disabilities and hold high expectations for their students while having a greater understanding of modification and accommodation.

Hammel and Gerrity (2012) examined the effect an online graduate-level course, specially designed to effectively teach skills and knowledge to include special needs students in music classroom activities, had on teacher perceptions of in-service teachers. This study also

used a pretest-posttest design. The class components included online discussion forums, quizzes, exams, a research paper that explores special education personnel, case study reviews, peer observation, and e-mail communication with the professor throughout instructional periods. The content of the instruction and assignments included 14 competencies of inclusive music education, such as understanding IDEA, awareness of personal roles and student needs, modification, assessment, classroom management, and communication. Comparative results from the pretest to the posttest show an overall positive gain in teacher perceptions of inclusive music education and teacher efficacy. Though the graduate students of Hammel and Gerrity's course and pre-service music educators of Cowell's course had improved knowledge in accommodation and modification, there was a found emphasis of teacher empathy Cowell's that was not an outcome in Hammel and Gerrity's post-test.

As some researchers looked the impact pre-service coursework and in-service training had on elementary music educator perceptions of inclusion and teacher efficacy in implementing inclusion, other authors looked where coursework is available and how many teachers have taken formal coursework or training. Through a survey sent to educational institutions, Salvador (2010) researched how music teacher education programs either required or offered a course that explicitly trained pre-service music educators to work with exceptional populations or, in significant ways, addressed the topic. The survey was completed by 109 institutions. Salvador found that less than half music education programs offered or required a course specific to working with students with disabilities. Through a survey completed by 201 music educators (McCord & Watts, 2010), findings showed that, in the past five years, 82 respondents received informal peer training as additional training on IEP, more than in conferences, single-day workshops, or college courses. At the same time, a fourth of respondents said they have had no

training in special education in the past five years. This lack of access to coursework and training and prevalence of informal peer training found by the 2010 survey studies disagrees with the findings of a 2024 survey study of 179 Wisconsin music educators who more than half reported have taken coursework specific to working with students with disabilities (Jones, 2024). This study did not specify from which institutions these teachers received their coursework; however, it raises a question related to the previous 2010 studies. Is the reason for a higher percentage of 2024 teachers citing they have taken courses specific to working with students with disabilities correlated to a possible growing percentage of institutions that require special education courses for music educators? The limitations of Jones' 2024 study could be diminished by a cross-state study on the percentages of music educators who have taken special education-specific courses. Further research should re-examine the number of institutions that require special education courses in their music education program.

Hong Kong Inclusion

In Hong Kong, inclusion has been written into the country's education policy since 2001. A group of researchers have brought insight into how a lack of resources and training have negatively impacted primary music teachers' perceptions and efficacy in implementing inclusion. In a 2016 multi-case study, primary music teacher responded with challenges in teaching students with disabilities due to their challenges in music learning (Wong & Chik, 2016a). On the other hand, the authors found that teachers did not modify and accommodate students with disabilities because music teachers lack resources and knowledge needed to address the needs of students with disabilities. These findings were also found in a 2016 survey that reported that music educators are more concerned with a lack of teacher and student learning support than with social acceptance of special education needs students (Wong et al., 2016).

These findings continued to be echoed more recently. In a 2019 study in Hong Kong, authors re-examined elementary music teacher efficacy in inclusive classrooms (Wong et al., 2019). They found that teachers' self-efficacy was moderate yet showed growth from the 2016 studies. Teachers' self-efficacy was impacted by positive domains, such as the ability to remain calm in stressful situations; it was also affected negatively by external domains, such as difficulty dealing efficiently with unexpected situations (Wong et al. 2019). These results agree with the previous research in Hong Kong, which found that teachers, while able to remain calm, still lack the knowledge and skills to respond to student's needs while in inclusive music classrooms. This is because Hong Kong's Education Bureau's in-service training on inclusion is based on core-subject teachers and excludes music. Researchers suggest for teachers to gain positive self-efficacy, there is a need for peer-sharing between music educators that could be included in the Education Bureau's in-service courses (Wong & Chik, 2016b).

Research has also shown that elementary music teachers' perceptions of inclusion vary based on specific components of inclusion and are impacted by various factors. Several researchers have mentioned that one factor that influences teacher efficacy in implementing inclusive elementary music classrooms is pre-service and in-service education and training (Cowell, 2012; Hammel & Gerrity, 2012; Pino, 2022; Salvador, 2015). Though elementary music educators are responsible for including students with IEPs in general music classrooms, the training and education needed to successfully do that are not always available for elementary music educators. Furthermore, training and education are different across institutions. Additional questions that research can explore are the frequency and types of training provided by districts and institutions to prepare pre-service teachers and support in-service teachers to teach inclusive elementary music classrooms.

Teachers' Experiences in Special Education

In elementary school, the music teachers tend to work with all students in the building, including the students with IEPs. Under IDEA, teachers are part of the special education team/stakeholders; therefore, they are held responsible for upholding the IDEA. Students protected under IDEA also have the right to a Least Restrictive Environment, where students are supported in the general education setting when appropriate. The second theme that arose in research on inclusion is the experiences and collaborations of elementary music teachers in the special education team.

Teachers' Engagement in the IEP Process

Teachers' role in the IEP team is reflective of the IEP process. For a student with a disability to receive an IEP, they must be recommended for evaluation. The recommendation, also referred to as a case study, is supplemented with weeks of data demonstrating adverse impact on general education. Then, if the recommendation is valid, the student will go under an evaluation. If the evaluation determines a need for an IEP, then the IEP is written according to the individual student. Then, the IEP is implemented with annual IEP meetings to revise goals, accommodations, and services where needed. This lengthy process involves much work on the special education team, which the music educator is part of. Researchers have been interested in how elementary music educators are participating in the IEP process.

A recent survey conducted by Jones (2024) researched Wisconsin music educators' involvement in the IEP process, accessibility to IEPs, teacher perceptions of IEPs, and teacher recommendations. The results showed a large majority of 179 music teachers were involved in the evaluation process, mostly by filling out forms for a case study or consulting on a case study. Half of teachers attend the IEP meeting, yet a significant number of those teachers attended only

one IEP meeting a year. Jones also found a majority of teachers were not informed of or invited to IEP meetings. Overall, many teachers had challenges in accessing IEPs on their students and for those who did, did not refer to them more than once. Though teachers were participating in the evaluation process of IEPs, they were less participatory in IEP meetings and in on-going referencing of IEP document. These findings were also reflected in an early survey that reported more than half of 201 music educators did not participate in the IEP process in a 2010 survey study (McCord & Watts, 2010).

Music Educators' Collaboration with Special Education Team

The IEP team is established in a way that relies on effective communication and collaboration. Data on a student is collected from all appropriate service providers on the student and is analyzed to determine the next steps in the student's education. This collaboration is well-documented legally between members of the IEP team. In elementary school, a model of collaboration between the special education teacher, homeroom teacher, and specialized personnel, such as a speech-language pathologist and occupational therapist, results in more student engagement and learning (Gerrity et al., 2013). Collaboration with each of these IEP stakeholders looks different and there are different benefits from it. The follow studies give insight into how elementary music educator are and could collaborate with each of the IEP stakeholders.

A case study involving 10 graduate students in a 3-week intensive music education graduate course highlighted the benefits of collaborating with parents (Taylor, 2017). Each day of the course, in addition to class discussion based on assigned readings, students watched a presentation from a parent of a disabled child. Data collected through interviews and journal reflections showed that interactions with parents graduate students better understood parent and

child perspectives including families' expectations and goals for the student during inclusive music instruction. Additionally, students enrolled in the graduate course gained a deeper understanding of special education concepts and strategies to support students with disabilities in inclusive settings. The same collaboration benefits of better knowing families' expectations of students in the music inclusion classroom and strategies for support were reported by music educators in an earlier survey study (Scott et al., 2007). Like the findings of Majerus and Taylor on the collaboration of music educators and paraeducators, the music educators reported to Scott et al. that teachers did not often reach out to families to collaborate despite positive outcomes when they did.

A case study of a music therapist and an elementary music educator conducted by Smith (2018) highlighted that collaboration is important to support students with IEPs, though work under the same modalities is focused on different goals. The music educator is qualified to support music instruction among all learning abilities. On the other hand, music therapists are focused on language and communication, as well as behavioral and psychosocial, cognitive, musical, perceptual, and motor goals. Like the previous studies on collaboration between music educators with parents, collaboration with music therapist offer insight into strategies for support and student goals or expectations during the inclusive music class.

Majerus and Taylor (2020) state that paraprofessionals are not only there to assist in the provision of special education as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act but are there to collaborate with music educators to form a successful inclusive classroom. Their 2020 survey study found that elementary music educators view paraeducators as helpful assistants inside the music classroom but are currently only assisting in managing behavior and physical assistance. Further, most of the affirming open comments were coded by collaboration.

However, almost none of the teachers reporting having regular meetings with paraprofessionals and special education teachers outside of the music classroom for discussing goals and collaborating on strategies.

A lack of current collaboration between elementary music teachers and the IEP team, despite the known benefits of collaboration, was also found in survey research that reported fewer than half of music educators collaborated (Brown et al., 2023). Fewer than half collaborated with paraeducators and special education teachers and even fewer collaborated with parents, music therapists, and health professionals. Research should explore why elementary music educators are not collaborating, despite teachers reporting benefits when they do.

Music Educators' Role in Non-Music related IEP Goals

An additional purpose of the IEP for students is to prepare them with the skills and knowledge for a meaningful post-graduation life. This means that IEP goals are categorized by reading, writing, math, social, and occupational goals. The emphasis on helping students achieve these goals questions the expectation of students with IEPs inside inclusive music education classrooms. Researchers found that students with IEPs can practice and improve on non-music IEP goals through inclusive elementary music education (Draper, 2017; Lee et al. 2002; Salvador 2015; Silvestre & Valero, 2005).

In a case study of two students with IEPs in an inclusive elementary music classroom conducted by Salvador (2015), the discussion of the data was focused on the balancing of social goals and musical goals. For some students with severe disabilities, the purpose of inclusion is to provide social interaction with nondisabled peers rather than mastering academic concepts regardless of the setting for inclusion. For these two students, their only inclusion time was during music class. Salvador emphasizes that communication between special education and

music teachers is imperative to understanding the balance between social goals written in their IEP and music goals.

A study of an intervention dance program with an inclusive kindergarten-aged group found that students with disabilities who displayed inappropriate behaviors, like biting and pushing peers and noncompliance, prior to the dance intervention had a decrease of inappropriate behaviors and an increase of appropriate (Lee et al., 2002). The authors reported that peer-mediated group dancing to music that involved touching with non-disabled peers was an intervention for student with social needs.

Another case study measured numbers of times students of students with learning disabilities and/or speech or language impairments engaged in behaviors that were related to their IEP goals in four inclusive elementary music classrooms (Draper, 2017). Like the findings of Salvador (2015) and Lee et al. (2002) all students engaged in behaviors related to social IEP objectives through peer interaction. Of all the observations, none of the students displayed behaviors related to their math IEP goal but had at least one opportunity to practice a literacy goal.

In addition to literacy goals, students with IEPs may engage in behaviors related to speech IEP goals. Silvestre & Valero (2005) found through a controlled experiments within a mainstreamed that music education improved supra-segmental aspects of speech, such as voice control and simple sentence structuring, in deaf children.

Collaboration between elementary music educators and members of the IEP team is key to understanding student expectations and supporting non-music IEP goals within inclusive music classrooms. Collaboration must be frequent and individual to each student as each student has their own goals and appropriate accommodations.

Student Learning/ Behavior and Strategies for Instruction

While much research on inclusion is focused on teacher perceptions and experiences, there is a third prevalent theme focused on student behaviors and strategies of instruction to impact student outcomes of learning and engagement.

Observing Student Behavior

The following research explores student behavior from students with and without IEPs in the inclusive elementary music classroom. Various lenses have been used to observe student behavior, from on-/off-task behavior to musical ability.

In the 2014 survey study conducted by VanWeedlen and Whipple (2014), reports stated that more elementary music teacher participants disagreed than agree that students with special needs display the same level of musical achievement as peers without disabilities. This finding is contrary to that of a previous multi-case study (Scott et al., 2007) on teacher perceptions that found that students with IEPs often exceeded their teacher's academic expectations. VanWeedlen and Whipple (2014) also found that, while the percentage of teachers who believed that having students with special needs in classrooms hindered nondisabled peer learning had dropped since a survey study in 1990, a fourth of teachers still held that thought.

While some research has focused on student behaviors through teachers' perceptions, many case studies have directly observed and reported these behaviors in inclusive music settings. Researchers found that all students exhibit different behavior based on placement (Jellison, 2002; Lee et al., 2002; Salvador, 2015). Salvador's (2015) case study observed two students with cognitive impairments who participated in both a music class with their self-contained classroom and an inclusive music classroom. Salvador discussed the differences in Katie's behavior in the inclusion classroom, where she exhibited more "shutdown" behavior, and

in the self-contained music classroom, where she displayed more leadership and musical engagement. Another case study observed on-task participation of nondisabled peers close to and away from two students with disabilities (Jellison, 2002). Reports stated students were more on-task than off-task, though percentages for on-task behavior were higher when students were seated away from peers with disabilities. Off-task behavior was also higher for non-disabled students seated near and away from one of the two disabled students. Overall, results from both Jellison and Salvador show that there are observable differences between behaviors based on proximity to students with disabilities and without disabilities.

Instructional and Behavior Management Strategies

Researchers have also studied the impacts of specific variables, including instructional strategies, on student engagement and learning. Accommodations of students are individual and reflect each individual's needs. A support for one student may not be appropriate for another student. Nevertheless, the following research suggests effective strategies for elementary music teachers in inclusion settings for specific categories of disability. Three strategies that were most common among the research were risk-free student choice/improvisation (Gerrity et al, 2013; McCord, 2009; Pino et al., 2002; Wong, 2021; Yinger et al., 2022), peer interaction/ assistance (Draper et al. 2019; Salvador, 2015; Lee et al. 2002), and multiple modalities of representation and engagement (Draper, 2021, Gerrity et al., 2013; Pino et al., 2022; Rocha & Cardoso 2019; Yinger et al., 2022).

Improvisation and student choice were found supportive of students with autism in inclusive music classrooms (Gerrity et al., 2013; McCord 2009). McCord's case study found that imitation, which is an instructional strategy used in many traditional music classrooms is unsupportive of students with Autism who have a hard time imitating a teacher in call and

response. Instead, a call and response that is based on improvisation gives room for students with ASD to show understanding of musical concepts and participate in inclusive large group activities. Improvisation was also found to support students with severe cognitive disabilities (Wong, 2021) and visual impairments (Pino et al., 2022).

Interaction with peers is central to inclusion. Research have also found that intentional peer interaction and assistance are used as a strategy for students with behavior disabilities (Lee et al., 2002), visual impairments (Pino et al., 2022), and severe cognitive disabilities (Draper et al., 2019; Salvador, 2015). Peer interaction was shown to be helpful in mediating behavior (Lee et al., 2002) and in redirection of student's attention (Salvador, 2015). In 2019, there was a research-based action research on explicitly guiding positive interactions of 1st-grade students with and without severe cognitive abilities in a music education setting (Draper et al., 2019). This was found successful and recommended, as students should not be expected to know how to support each other especially when expectations of students are not comparable.

The final strategies to support students in inclusive music classrooms is providing multiple representations of instruction, modalities for action, and engagement (Yinger et al., 2022). Multisensory representation was found supportive of student with visual impairments (Pino et al., 2022) through alternative music notation, including body movement, and scaffolding the auditory representation. Color coding of music notation also was a modification of representation that was found useful for a student with severe cognitive disabilities in a case study (Salvador, 2015). Providing multiple means for action was found to be helpful for students with Autism (Draper, 2021; McCord, 2009), visual impairment (Pino et al., 2022), and Trisomy 21 (Rocha & Cardoso, 2019). In a 2021 case study (Draper, 2019), students with Autism in a mainstreaming school found support in a larger school culture of inclusivity through access to a

variety of inclusive music making opportunities both in music class and student ensembles. Beyond the variety inclusive music settings students can engaged in, such as Soundbeam, a 'touch-free' assistive music technology device that turns physical movements into sounds and music, supported students with Autism (McCord, 2009) and Trisomy 21 (Rocha & Cardoso, 2019) in music-making alongside their nondisabled peers.

Summary

Three themes drawn from the literature on inclusive music education since 2000 include (1) teacher perceptions, (2) teacher experiences in the special education team, and (3) student behaviors and teaching strategies to impact student learning. Overall, teacher perceptions have grown more positive over the 20th century, all while barriers such as lack of training and in-service support can lead to more adverse perceptions of students with IEPs and the effectiveness of inclusion in elementary general music classrooms. Though elementary music teachers teach all students in their building, their involvement in the IEP process is limited for various reasons. Collaboration with special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents also varies in frequency and purpose. Determination of focus between student music and social goals continues to be a gray area as it depends on the student. Strategies that foster increased student engagement vary from student to student. However, universal strategies that can benefit all students, such as promoting positive peer interaction, also effectively improve student achievement amongst students with disabilities.

Pre-service courses and in-service trainings provide general introductions to working with students with disabilities. These courses and trainings have proven to boost teacher efficacy and build positive perceptions of inclusive elementary music classrooms. However, a gap exists in providing teachers with knowledge in adapting and modifying elementary music curricula. As

research is being conducted on strategies that can promote growth in student achievement, specifically in the setting of elementary general music education, there needs to be research into whether and how these strategies are included in school district training and university courses. The purpose of this culminating project has been to explore inclusive elementary music classrooms and provide teachers with knowledge to effectively support students with IEPs in this setting. The focal questions for this research included: What practices are elementary music teachers using in inclusive classrooms using to support students with IEPs in inclusive elementary music classrooms and what instructional strategies has research found effective? What goals are identified for students with IEPs in the inclusive music classroom? In what ways are elementary music teachers collaborating with parents and families to support students with IEPs in inclusive music settings? In the discussion section, these questions will be answered using the findings of the literature review and practices analyzed in the action plan section.

Action Plan

This section analyzes how recommendations from the three emerging themes of the literature review are reflected on an elementary school in Western Washington. With 243 students enrolled, this is a smaller elementary school in public school district. All students with IEPs are taught in an inclusive homeroom class and are pulled out for specialized instruction in core-subjects and other services in accordance with their IEP. All students attend music with their homeroom class twice a week for 30 minutes. The current music teacher holds a certificate in general elementary education and K-12 special education with endorsements to teach instrumental and choral music.

The following research recommendations emerge from the three themes found in the literature review section of this paper. The three tables are reflective of the three themes in the

order in which they were presented in the literature review beginning with teacher perceptions, followed by teachers’ experiences as part of the special education team, and concluding with strategies for student learning in an inclusive elementary music classroom.

Teacher Perceptions: Training and Resources for Teacher Efficacy

Supporting students with disabilities is not a straightforward task but requires specific knowledge and skills. Often music education majors do not have coursework needed to support students with disabilities in their inclusive classroom. Additionally, to ensure that multiple students with disabilities can be taught in an inclusive setting, elementary music educators need to be equipped with appropriate resources and technology. The following table covers the benefits of training and resources on teacher efficacy in supporting students with disabilities in an inclusive elementary music classroom.

Table 1

Training and Resources

What the research says...	The current practice...	What I recommend...
<p>Pre-Service Training Elementary music educators’ efficacy in teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive setting is positively impacted pre-service coursework on the topic (Colwell, 2012; Hammel & Gerrity, 2012; Jones, 2023; Salvador, 2010; VanWeedlen & Whipple, 2014)</p>	<p>To teach elementary music in the district, a teacher must hold a teaching certificate and have endorsements in music. The current teacher holds a general elementary/K-12 special education certificate with endorsements in music and had rigorous coursework on inclusive classrooms but not specific to inclusive music classrooms. During the interview, the hiring panel asked about the candidate's experience in working with diverse populations but not specific to disabilities.</p>	<p>This first recommendation is music education certification programs. There is a need for courses in supporting students with disabilities in the music classroom. Courses can consist of IEPs, disability categories and characteristics of each disability, and accommodations and modifications specific to music classrooms.</p>

	<p>The previous music teacher at this school held a teaching certificate in music education through a state college. That teacher did not have any coursework during their undergraduate certificate program. That teacher reflected that supporting students with disabilities was challenging and did not feel equipped to support all students.</p>	
<p>In-Service Training and Resources Elementary music educators' efficacy in teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive setting is positively impacted in-service training on the topic (Brown et al., 2023; Hammel & Gerrity, 2012; Pino, 2022; VanWeedlen & Whipple, 2014; Wong & Chik, 2016a; Wong & Chik, 2016b; Wong et al., 2019;)</p>	<p>Music educators have access to district provided training on working with students with IEPs, however they are not specific to inclusive music settings.</p> <p>Elementary music educators are part of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). These PLCs are composed of all the elementary music educators in the school district and hold time to share personal experiences using strategies for inclusive music education.</p> <p>Music educators can also request training by the district on inclusive music classrooms.</p>	<p>The school district should provide training on inclusion specific to the elementary music setting. Training should be around collaboration between elementary music educators and the special education team, accommodation and modification to the district approved music curriculum, disability categories and characteristics, tracking student data, and integration of IEP objectives in music lessons. These trainings should be made available to music educators as well special education teachers, music therapists, instructional coaches, paraeducators, and school therapists.</p>

Teacher’s Experience in Special Education: Collaboration with IEP Stakeholders

Adequate training and resources are needed to support students with disabilities, but they will not be sufficient alone. Elementary music educators cannot support students alone no matter their level of training. All members of the IEP team, including the elementary music educator,

must collaborate to gain deeper insight into each student that could not be known to general pre-service coursework and in-service training. The following table covers the benefits from collaborating with school personnel and families.

Table 2

Teacher Collaboration

What the research says...	The current practice...	What I recommend...
<p>Collaboration with School Personnel Music educators’ positively benefit from communication and collaboration with special education teachers, paraeducators, general education teachers, and therapists (Draper, 2017; Gerrity et al., 2013; Jones, 2023; Majerus & Taylor, 2020; McChord & Watts, 2010; Salvador, 2015; Smith, 2017)</p>	<p>The music educator collaborates with homeroom teachers and special education teachers when challenges with a particular student arise. There is no dialogue between the music educator and the speech-language pathologist or the occupational therapist. Currently, no paraeducators attend the music classroom.</p>	<p>The music educator should continue to collaborate with the special education teacher but with the expanded lens to all students with IEPs and not just students that the music educator feels challenged on. The music educator should also collaborate with the speech-language pathologist.</p>
<p>Collaboration with Families Music educators’ positively benefit from communication and collaboration with families (Gerrity et al., 2013; Scott et al., 2007; Taylor, 2017)</p>	<p>The music educator has communicated with several parents through family engagement events and during student pick-up. The teacher may make simple remarks about the students’ progress in the classroom but has not collaborated to better attend to the needs of students in the inclusive music setting.</p>	<p>At the beginning of the school year, the music educator can contact families and hold semi-structured open-ended interviews to better understand the student context, family expectations for students, and additional information that can be used to support students with IEPs in inclusive music classrooms.</p>

Instructional Strategies

Though accommodations and support are individual to each student and not based on their disability category, there are instructional strategies that are universal to support all

students, including those with disabilities in their relationship to their same-age nondisabled peers in an inclusive classroom.

Table 3

Instructional Strategies

What the research says...	The current practice...	What I recommend...
<p>Peer-Interaction Educating and facilitating positive peer-interactions/ peer-mentoring of students with and without IEPs increases all students' engagement and learning (Draper et al., 2019; Draper, 2017; Draper 2021; Jellison, 2002; Pino, 2022; Salvador 2015)</p>	<p>Most of the classroom instruction is done with the whole group. During dyad groupings, students with IEPs that have challenges in social and/or language skills are often grouped with students who are calm in their reactions. Other times the teacher has been their student's partner as opposed to their peers. There is no specific teaching of peer-interactions beyond classroom expectations of "being kind."</p>	<p>Music educators should explicitly teach and implement a task analysis for positive peer-interactions to support students with IEPs in the inclusive elementary music classroom.</p>
<p>Expand Opportunities to Engage in Music Making Increase the opportunities for active music making for students with and without disabilities (Draper, 2017) More student choice for participation (Gerrity et. al, 2013)</p>	<p>Students have music twice a week for 30 minutes in their home room. Every month at an assembly, students are engaged in communal singing during an assembly with more formal performances during special assemblies. During class, students spend about 40% of the class in music making and the rest during instruction or other activity.</p>	<p>The school could provide additional times for students with IEPs to engage in music making in a non-traditional classroom setting such as a student ensemble or adaptive music class in addition to their inclusive music classroom.</p>
<p>Universal Design for Learning and other Instructional Frameworks Use of combining multiple curriculums and multi-sensory resources for instruction in the inclusive</p>	<p>The teacher has had pre-service courses and in-service training on pedagogical frameworks of Universal Design for Learning and Culturally Responsive Teaching. The teacher</p>	<p>The teacher can provide additional styles of grouping to allow for students to engage differently, independently, and self-paced.</p>

<p>music classroom under a Universal Design for Learning Framework (Draper 2021; Gerrity et. al, 2013; Pino, 2022; Yinger et al., 2022)</p>	<p>creates very simple and explicit instruction and expectations for students. The teacher also refers back to how classroom content connects to students' funds of knowledge and other benefits from music making. On the other hand, the teacher does not leave room for much student-choice for grades 2-5. Activities are often whole group activities and do not provide multiple ways for engagement and multiple modalities for students to show understanding of concepts.</p>	<p>The teacher can include more activities for individual sound exploration and risk-free student choice.</p>
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<p>Effective Behavior Plan Students with disabilities are supported in inclusive music classrooms when there is a consistent effective behavior plan in place(Gerrity et al. 2013)</p>	<p>The music teacher implements a Superstar Class reward system. For Students with IEPs, when appropriate, the music teacher signs off a check-in sheet and discusses student behavior and expectations with students at the start and after class.</p>	<p>The teacher implements a behavior plan that currently only monitors full classroom behavior. The teacher should add to the plan individual self-monitoring and intervention.</p>
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Summary

In this section we looked at recommendations from the literature and analyzed an elementary school to see how practices reflect those recommendations. I will now examine the literature more closely in the discussion section.

Discussion

The research questions that guided this project were: What practices are elementary music teachers using in inclusive classrooms using to support students with IEPs in inclusive elementary music classrooms and what instructional strategies has research found effective? What goals are identified for students with IEPs in the inclusive music classroom? In what ways

are elementary music teachers collaborating with parents and families to support students with IEPs in inclusive music settings? In this section, I will answer these questions in the discussion of findings. I will then provide recommendations for stakeholders in Washington state to align with literature in implications for teachers, students, and schools. Finally, my limitations and recommendations for future research will be provided.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, I will discuss the findings from the literature review to answer the focal questions that guided this project. I conclude the discussion with an additional analysis of domestic and foreign research on inclusive elementary music classrooms.

Instructional Strategies and Frameworks

My first focal question is informed the third theme, student behavior and instructional strategies, discussed in the literature review. The dynamic nature of pedagogy necessitates a continuous search for research-confirmed instructional strategies, a priority shared by administrators and teachers alike. The research on inclusive elementary music classrooms, which I consider crucial, recommends a strategy and instructional framework that extends beyond music classrooms. The strategy is teaching and facilitating positive peer interactions. The pedagogical framework is one that resonates with Universal Design for Learning.

Peer Interactions. Peer interactions are a cornerstone of inclusive classrooms, viewed through lens that education is not merely a relationship between student and teacher but also between student peers. Though there are many studies on peer interactions in psychology and special education research, several studies have focused on peer interactions specific to inclusive music classrooms. Peer interactions support students with IEPs in inclusive elementary music classrooms by building positive classroom relationships, supporting social IEP objectives, and

peer mentoring. In a case-study observation, Salvador (2015) observed peer assistance of students with severe cognitive impairment in an elementary music classroom. In the observation, peers help redirect off-task behavior during a recorder activity. In action research conducted by a research team in collaboration with an elementary music teacher, a model was developed to explicitly teach positive peer interactions between students with and without severe disabilities (Draper et al., 2019). The authors claim that often, interactions of students with severe disabilities are with paraprofessionals and not their typical peers. In order to appropriately support students with severe disabilities, there need to be positive interactions between all-inclusive classroom personnel, including non-disabled peers. I believe that supportive, inclusive classrooms are not defined by labels assigned to people in the classroom but by the relationships between teachers, peers, and paraprofessionals. Just as teachers and paraprofessionals take pre-service training on working with students with disabilities, students also need the same training and models for supporting their peers with IEPs. Draper (2017) also claims that peer interactions are imperative for building a supportive, inclusive classroom for all students with IEPs and supporting students in meeting social IEP objectives.

Universal Design for Learning. In addition to peer interactions, research has recommended that elementary music educators use pedagogical frameworks to support students with IEPs in inclusive music classrooms. One of these frameworks is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a framework that gives students multiple modalities of instruction and engagement that best fit an inclusive classroom. There are three components of UDL: Engagement, Representation, and Action. Aspects of UDL that support inclusive music classrooms include minimizing threats, optimizing individual choice, offering alternatives for representation, clear communication, and appropriate self-goal setting.

A study that looked for conditions that support students with disabilities in learning found that strategies of student choice, explicit instruction, minimization of distractions, and a positive learning environment successfully raised scores on a pre-test and post-test on music abilities (Gerrity et al., 2013). Though only studied named UDL directly (Yinger et al. 2022), other researchers recommended strategies that can be identified as part of UDL. UDL aspects of risk-free, student choice, and authenticity were also found through musical improvisation in Wong's (2021) gamification strategy for fostering the creativity of students with intellectual disability (2021). Pino's (2022) study on adapting three standard music curricula to accommodate students with visual impairments claimed that multisensory resources and multiple modalities for engagement are imperative to support that population of students. These recommendations are centered on UDL's components of representation and action. Salvador's (2015) observations of students with cognitive impairments in an inclusive elementary music classroom also agreed with Pino's recommendations for strategies for students with visual impairments. Here, Salvador observed an accommodation like color-coding music notes was found to boost engagement during a music making activity. UDL is an instruction framework that supports all students with and without IEPs. Research-based strategies for supporting students with IEPs in inclusive music classrooms that are foundational in UDL's framework reflect a saying I have heard throughout my career in education: special education is the best practice for all students. In other words, that all students benefit from an individualized education with instruction that meets them where they are at.

IEP Objectives in the Inclusive Music Classroom

IEP objectives can be categorized into major sections: communication goals, social-emotional goals, academic goals, behavioral goals, and motor skills goals. A guiding question for

this project is: What goals are identified for students with IEPs in the inclusive music classroom? These individualized goals can sometimes take precedence over music goals established by the music educator for all students.

Research has sought to clarify which IEP objectives students can work on during their inclusive music education and how elementary music educators support students' non-musical IEP objectives. In a study to determine to what extent music educators participated in the IEP process (Jones, 2024), teachers agreed that IEP goals and objectives are typically applicable in their music classrooms. Draper observed how often students with IEP objectives related to speech, language, and literacy engaged in behaviors that helped them progress on their goals during their inclusive elementary music class (Draper, 2017). Draper found that students had several intentional structured and unintentional unstructured situations where they engaged in behaviors related to their IEP objective. One observed goal was communication between peers. Students were able to work on these goals during structured activity and grouping by the teacher. However, students also interacted with peers during not structured activity time. Additionally, other music literacy activities supported student growth in their IEP goals.

Another study observed two students with severe cognitive impairments in their inclusive music classroom (Salvador, 2015). All these students' academic instruction took place in a self-contained room with a special education teacher. However, these two students attended music classes in their self-contained classrooms and at different times for inclusive music classes. This raised the question of the goals of students during inclusive music class. The author pointed out that parents of these students control the services their students receive. Others recommend collaboration with the special education teacher and other specialists (Draper, 2017; Jones, 2014).

While some researchers focused on the student's goals, Smith (2018) sought to understand the role difference between music therapists and music educators in working with students with IEPs. Findings showed that music therapist goals were based on language and communication goals, which were the most common, followed by behavioral, psychosocial, cognitive, musical, perceptual, and motor goals. Music education goals target the teaching and learning of musical skills and concepts. The author and music therapist observed the inclusive music class in this study. The music therapist found that activities in the inclusive music classroom could support students in IEP objectives, but how the music educator responded to formative assessment changed the focus from goals that the music therapist would work on to musical skills and concepts. Collaboration between elementary music teachers and special education specialists will clarify what IEP objectives can and should be focused on in the inclusive music classroom and how music educators can change their approach to music education when appropriate to accommodate non-music IEP goals.

My certification is not in music education but in special education and general education. This pre-service course in core-subject methodologies in preparation to teach in general education has opened my view and approach to music education in ways that I might not have had in a music education certification program. I always knew music contained components of literacy and math, but I was not trained in teaching those subjects. However now with the knowledge to teach these courses and with collaboration with the general education teacher I am able to incorporate math, literacy, and science concepts students are learning in their classroom into our music classroom. This is a huge support for all students, not just those with IEPs. Additionally, with my special education background, I can support specialized instruction in tangent with music activities and provide students with IEPs to work on their objectives in the

inclusive elementary classroom while participating in the class activities. Music class meets the following areas of need for many students with disabilities, such as social interactions with disabled and non-disabled peers, sharing attention, sensory processing and integration, following multi-step directions, math, reading, memory and recall, behavioral regulation skills, and fine and gross motor skills.

Music Educator and Parent Collaboration

The third focal question for this project is: In what ways are elementary music teachers collaborating with parents and families to support students with IEPs in inclusive music settings? In addition to collaborating with the special education teacher and specialist, elementary music educators can better support their students with IEPs in inclusive music settings by collaborating with parents and families. In a study of music education, graduate students interviewed parents of students with disabilities and reported several insights into teacher perspectives, parents' perspectives, and student perspectives (Taylor, 2017), thus identifying students' strengths that could support learning in an inclusive music classroom. These graduate students also heard stories about insensitive interactions between teachers and families, which led to an increased sense of advocacy for parents of students with IEPs. Developing meaningful parent-teacher collaboration may be beneficial in combating high drop-out rates for students with IEPs.

Though collaboration between elementary music educators and parents is beneficial, teachers only contact families occasionally. A 2007 study survey on music teachers' perceptions, opinions, and experiences on inclusion (Scott et al., 2007) found that most teachers contact parents when needed, despite 100% of respondents saying that they learned something from contacting families. A more recent survey study echoes this lack of continuous communication and collaboration (Jones, 2024). Less than half of these music educator respondents

communicated with parents of students with IEPs to report on their progress. The lack of teacher-to-parent communication could be caused by music educators and all teachers needing more time to plan lessons, analyze data, and grade assessments.

Domestic vs. Foreign Research

An additional analysis between focal questions and findings of domestic and foreign research on inclusive elementary music education is needed in addition to this study because of the prevalence of research on the topic in Hong Kong and the United States. Of the 30 articles gathered to draw the literature review, five were from a research team in Hong Kong, one from Korea, three from Spain, one from Portugal, one from a Scandinavian research team, one from Australia, and eighteen from the United States.

For context, inclusive education has been written in the United States federal law since 1975 under the IDEA. This act guarantees that students with disabilities have the right to free public education in their least restrictive environment. The least restrictive environment a student can have is in the general education setting alongside their non-disabled peers. Research around mainstreaming, a previously term for inclusive education in elementary music settings, has been around since the act's adoption. In Hong Kong, inclusive education has only been part of the region's policy since 2001, with the mandatory reform of "Learning to Learn."

Educational researchers in Hong Kong looked at the international research on primary music teacher perspectives on inclusive education in primary schools and looked to find perspectives of primary music teachers in Hong Kong (Wong & Chik, 2015; Wong & Chik, 2016a; Wong & Chik, 2016b; Wong & Chik, 2016c; Wong et al., 2019). This focus on teacher perspectives in Hong Kong research is shared with American research. Of the five articles on inclusive education in the primary music classroom from Hong Kong, four were specifically on

teacher perspectives and experiences. The sixth and most recent study was on gamification as a strategy for primary music teachers to foster creativity and engagement of students with disabilities.

In the United States, teachers since the turn of the century have felt positive about the impacts of inclusion education (Scott et al., 2007) and are moderately confident in their ability to meet the needs of their students with IEPs (Brown et al., 2023; VanWeelden & Whipple, 2014). In Hong Kong, primary music teachers feel positive about inclusion but are not confident in supporting their students with disabilities. Primary music teachers in Hong Kong reported that they set lower expectations of students with disabilities because of their inability to accommodate and modify curriculum (Wong & Chik, 2016a) and their lack of efficacy in dealing with behavior interventions (Wong et al., 2019). Three variables impact teacher perspectives in Hong Kong. First, there needs to be more in-school support for primary music teachers and other teachers beyond core subjects like math, reading, and writing (Wong & Chik, 2015). Second, the primary music curriculum that Hong Kong's Curriculum Development Council writes does include support needed for students with disabilities (Wong & Chik, 2016c). Third, primary music teachers lack pre-service and in-service training in working with students with disabilities (Wong & Chik, 2016a). The level of pre-service and in-service training also impacts the perspectives of elementary music teachers in the United States. Brown et al. (2023) found that more confident teachers also had pre-service training in working with students with disabilities and collaborated with other teachers and specialists to find appropriate supports for individual students in inclusive elementary music classrooms.

As an elementary music teacher, I feel very confident in my ability to include and support students with IEPs in my classroom. I relate this to my pre-service coursework and completion of

a special education certification. I also believe that teachers should keep up on the current research coming out to continuously improve their practice. In-service training on inclusion specific to music education is needed to keep that confidence as each year there are new students with IEPs and new individual needs. I have also collaborated with my school's special education teacher through classroom observations and feedback on support of individual students with IEPs in my inclusive music classroom.

Implications for Teachers, Students, and Schools

Inclusive education has been part of the United States education policy since the 1970s, and the number of students in inclusive education settings is growing. School districts must prepare all teachers working with children with disabilities in an inclusive setting. Training is often focused on core-subject instruction taught in the general education classroom. However, IEP objectives should be taught and practiced across settings to generalize students' knowledge and skills. For this to be possible, there is a need for in-service training on supporting students with disabilities specifically in inclusion music classrooms. Trainings should include UDL in the elementary music classroom, special education concepts, and accommodations and modifications in the elementary music classrooms. In-service training is useless without the necessary resources to implement the knowledge and skills. Schools must provide in-school resources such as an elementary music curriculum that includes students with disabilities, adaptive musical equipment, instruments, and technology, and personnel such as paraprofessionals and music therapists. Co-teaching and push-in services should also be available during music class to support students and music educators. For this to be possible, administrators must compose schedules that give music educators adequate time to collaborate with the special education team across the building.

For students to be appropriately supported in inclusive elementary music classrooms, elementary music educators need to change their perception of being solely educators of music but also part of the special education system who are invested in supporting students with IEPs to reach their individual objectives. Though not all students will be in the classroom for the same purpose, it does not mean they are to be left out of the classroom or class activities. Teachers should take it upon themselves to participate in the IEP process and collaborate with the special education team to better understand which IEP objectives they can support and how to do that in a music lesson. Teachers should also adopt frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning to meet better the needs of all their students where they are. Also, for those who do not teach a mandatory music curriculum, teachers should seek out classroom resources that consider the needs of their students. Music teachers most often teach all students in the school yet only see each class for up to 1 hour a week. This means music teachers need more time to get to know their students. Music educators should communicate and collaborate with families to know their students better. Having this relationship with families is vital to better supporting their students.

Students with disabilities are supported in the inclusive elementary music classroom not just by adults but by all students. Non-disabled students should be informed how to support their disabled peers through positive peer-interaction models. Positive peer interaction is as imperative to inclusion in the elementary music classroom as the setting itself. Music is a communal activity even when performing alone, one is performing to an audience. If they play to themselves in the music classroom, there is still a sense of community because they play on instruments shared by all students. Positive peer-interactions in the elementary music classroom allow students with disabilities to participate with their community in ways that cannot be replicated outside of the

arts. Insight into inclusion in the elementary music classroom also shows that music activities can support personal non-music goals for any student.

Implications for Further Research

In the last twenty years, research on inclusion in the elementary music classroom has held many gaps, but one extensive gap is in studies on students in these settings. Two of the three themes identified in the literature focus on teachers, their perspectives, and their experiences. This focus on teachers is essential, and teachers must be informed of what they need to support students with IEPs in inclusive elementary music classrooms. However, research focused on student perspectives and experiences in inclusive elementary music classrooms is needed. There is also research on the behavior of students with IEPs in this setting, but it disregards the students' perspective. Researchers should study the long-term impacts students will have from inclusive music settings. For example, do inclusive music classrooms set students up to participate in the arts during their secondary and post-secondary education years? This research can be used to advocate for additional inclusive music classroom resources that students with IEPs need from administrators, school districts, and teachers.

Researcher should also study ways that districts and school policies impact the implementation of inclusive elementary music classrooms. Research has echoed that collaboration between the music educator and the special education team is needed to support students in the inclusive elementary music classroom. Teachers, domestic and international, mentioned barriers such as lack of planning time and training to support students with disabilities in inclusive elementary classrooms. What state, district, and school structures and additional expectations of music educators pull teachers away from adequate planning time and collaboration with IEP team members?

Limitations of the Project

When searching for literature, the following keywords were used: inclusion, inclusive, mainstreaming, music classrooms, music education, special education, elementary, primary, and students with disabilities. The dates of the studies used were from 2003 to 2024. I utilized the complete academic search of all EBSCOhost databases available through the University of Washington. I utilized the Educational Research Information Center database exclusively as well during searches. To contextualize the literature, I also cited government websites that included information on education policy and population sizes.

Though I wanted to only use articles that worked specifically for inclusion in the elementary music classroom, several survey articles were sent out to music educators K-12. I only included these articles if they broke the data down between grade bands and if the elementary music educators' sample was greater than secondary. This still presented a limitation because even though the sample size of elementary educators was more than secondary educator sample, it was a small sample size. There was also an article that was a case study of students with disabilities participating in a non-inclusion music education program through a university. The reason it was included was because of the intent of the research to find a model and instructional strategies for inclusion.

Another limitation of the study was the scope of the student samples. Some articles were specific to a disability category, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, visual impairments, and severe cognitive disabilities. Due to the lack of available research, I included all articles on inclusion in the elementary music classroom regardless of the disability category sampled and discussed in the article. This presented a limitation because an instructional strategy suggested by a researcher for students with severe cognitive impairments may not be supportive of all students

with severe cognitive impairments or students with another disability. An instructional strategy of modeling positive peer-interactions could be argued to be support of all students regardless of the disability however the way it is implemented may look different dependent on the student needs.

Conclusions

The education of youth and their experiences as children impact their perspectives and experiences later in life. This is equally so for students with disabilities. Administrators, families, teachers, special education workers, peers, coaches, and legislators are responsible for preparing these students for successful futures and being community members. For music educators in inclusion settings, providing disabled students with support in a classroom whose subject is rooted in expressive communication and community is just as crucial as teaching core subjects and occupational skills. Supporting students with disabilities takes knowledge and skills.

Unfortunately, many music teachers do not have the multi-faceted knowledge and skills to adequately support students with disabilities for inclusion in the music classroom. This project sought to capture the breadth of knowledge and skills teachers need to holistically support these students. Though the needs of students with disabilities are unique to the individual, this project highlights what teachers need to consider meeting any student's needs.

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