

ONE ELEMENTARY MUSIC TEACHER'S BELIEFS ABOUT MUSICAL ABILITY:
CONNECTIONS TO TEACHING PRACTICE AND CLASSROOM CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

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With the intent of improving the musical experiences and opportunities provided to students in school music programs, the purpose of this research was to explore one elementary music teacher's beliefs about the nature of musical ability and the ways in which these beliefs relate to actions and lived experiences in the classroom. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows: (1) What is the nature and extent of the beliefs about students' musical abilities and capabilities held by one elementary music teacher who believes all students have the capacity to be musical? (2) How do beliefs about musical abilities manifest themselves in this teacher's actions and decision-making in the classroom? (3) How do beliefs about musical abilities manifest themselves in this teacher's interactions with students and, more broadly, in the classroom culture she creates? (4) What is the relationship between this teacher's beliefs about musical ability and her beliefs about the purpose of music education, specifically of elementary general music?

This investigation was a case study of one elementary general music teacher, Deena Ridge, who believes all of her students are musical. Data were collected using ethnographic techniques for a period of over two months. Multiple sources of data included extensive classroom observations documented through fieldnotes and video footage, audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, teacher journal entries, teaching artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, assessment tools), and researcher memos. Data were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through prolonged engagement in the field, collection of multiple data sources, participant member checks, and peer review of analysis.

Four themes emerged from the data: (1) Beliefs about musical ability, (2) Treating students as individuals, (3) Power of the learning environment, and (4) Encouraging lifelong engagement with music. The first theme focuses on Deena's core belief that all students have musical ability, her expectation that all students will develop some level of musical competence, and the factors to which she attributes observed differences in students' abilities. The second theme pertains to the ways in which Deena provides learning opportunities that are responsive to students as individuals in order to help them all achieve some level of musical success. The third theme involves Deena's belief that helping students to succeed musically depends on building a positive classroom environment and her practice of establishing an environment in which students feel safe, supported, and empowered. The final theme centers on Deena's larger goal of enabling all students to continue on to a lifetime of musical engagement by helping them become musically independent and providing them with positive and fulfilling musical experiences.

The findings of this study suggest that music educators' beliefs about students' musical abilities relate to their actions in the music classroom and interactions with students as well as to their beliefs about the purpose of music education. Music educators should reflect on these beliefs, the ways in which they relate to teaching practice, and the impact they may have on students' musical achievement and musical identity development. Additionally, music teacher educators should consider the role they might play in helping pre-service (as well as in-service) music teachers examine and possibly reshape their existing beliefs about music teaching and learning. Suggestions for future research are also discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Considering how widespread a phenomenon music is within our society, and the fact that listening to music is an important part of so many people’s daily lives, it is something of an enigma that so few people develop any significant level of performance ability.... In countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, almost every child in school receives classroom music instruction from an early age. Yet the general level of musical achievement in the school-age population is surely well below that of many other skills addressed by the school curriculum. An apparently almost irresistible popular line of thinking for this general lack of musical accomplishment in the population is the invocation of the presence or absence of ‘musical talent.’” (Sloboda, 1996, p. 107)

“A young child who grows up without acquiring competence in musical performance generally does so as part of a social process—one in which the child is indeed competent—of assimilating a somewhat generalized role of musical outsider. Taking such a role is a strategic response of a person whose performances have been systematically deprecated.” (Kingsbury, 1988, p. 74)

“Me? Musical? No way! I like music, but I’ve never really had any talent for it. When I was a kid, I enjoyed singing, but then someone told me I wasn’t very good at it. After that I just figured that I shouldn’t bother doing it any more since I wasn’t a talented singer. I like to listen to talented singers, but I don’t sing any more myself. During hymns in church, I usually just move my lips now because I don’t want other people to hear how bad I am.”

“I used to like playing music. I joined the band when I was in fifth grade, and I really enjoyed playing my trumpet. Then we had to audition for ‘chairs,’ and I ended up last chair. I

figured that meant I wasn't any good at music, so why should I bother? My friend, who was first chair, was a great player, but I just didn't have talent like he did so I decided to quit playing."

When one asks adults about their musical abilities, responses such as these fictitious ones are commonplace. In my own teaching, I have witnessed this first hand. For four semesters I taught a course aimed at preparing elementary education majors to incorporate music into their future classrooms, and each semester I would hear comments from students proclaiming their lack of musical ability. For example, on the first day of class I ask the students to write down some basic information about themselves, including what they want from me as the teacher, to which one student responded, "Be kind to those of us who can't sing, like me." I also taught an introduction to music education course in which a few non-music majors were enrolled. When asked his primary instrument, one of these non-music majors wrote, "I have zero musical talents."

The concept of musical talent as a bi-modal trait that some have and others do not permeates our culture (Blacking, 1973; Howe, Davidson, & Sloboda, 1998; Kingsbury, 1988; Sloboda, 1996; Sloboda, Davidson, & Howe, 1994). To account for differences in observed musical ability, many assume that these differences "are directly caused by inherent biological variability," which is present from birth and grants a minority of the population the "inborn potential to be musical" (Sloboda et al., 1994, p. 349).

The belief that musical ability is a special, innate talent is one that has been expressed by numerous scholars and researchers, notably the authors of several music tests. Carl Stumpf created the first test of musical ability in 1883, intending it to serve as a means for music teachers to identify talented potential students who would benefit from instruction (Hallam,

2006). Carl Seashore, who developed the Seashore *Measures of Musical Talent*, wrote extensively on musical talent, specifically stating:

Musical talent is a gift bestowed very unequally upon individuals. Not only is the gift of music itself inborn, but it is inborn in specific types. These types can be detected early in life, before time for beginning serious musical education. This fact presents an opportunity and places a great responsibility for the systematic inventory of the presence or absence of musical talent. (Seashore, 1919, p. 6)

While Seashore argued that music aptitude test scores are normally distributed among the population, this quote seems to suggest that he believed, at least on some level, that some have musical talent while others do not, at least to the same degree; this is supported by Koza's (2007) discovery that Seashore was a member of the advisory council of the American Eugenics Society and advocated for the use of his tests "to prevent wasting money on untalented youth" (p. 172). Similarly, Arnold Bentley, creator of the Bentley *Measures of Musical Abilities*, believed that "even the most anti-examination, anti-test, anti-success/failure egalitarian enthusiasts appear to accept that music, particularly instrumental playing, solo singing and/or composition, is a special case" and that "most people would agree that the earlier any performing ability, aptitude, or talent is discovered, the better for the child" (Bentley, 1975, p. 16). Additionally, in discussing musical creativity the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1983) refers to "the very few minds that secrete music" and states that "musical invention depends on special gifts, which can be developed only where they are innate" (p. 18).

Many among the general population believe in the concept of musical talent as an innate "gift," and this belief also is prevalent among music educators (Abril, 2007; Asmus, 1986; Biasutti, 2010; Brändström, 1999; Burnard, 2003; Clelland, 2006; Davis, 1994; Evans, Bickel, &

Pendarvis, 2000; Hallam, 2006; Hallam & Prince, 2003; Hallam & Shaw, 2002; Hewitt, 2006; Howe et al., 1998; Legette, 1998, 2002, 2012; Ruddock, 2012; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Shouldice, 2009, 2012; Sloboda, 1996, 2005; Sloboda et al., 1994; Thompson, 2000; Whidden, 2008, 2010). In a survey of 141 non-musicians, Davis (1994) found that over 75% believe “natural talent” or a “gift” is necessary for one to achieve at composing, singing, and playing instruments. Hallam and Prince (2003) asked 129 participants (both musicians and non-musicians) to complete the prompt “Musical ability is,” responses to which included statements such as “Music ability is very special, with only a minority of gifted people having real ability” (p. 16). Clelland (2006) found similar results in a survey of 80 music teachers. Of those who entered teaching from a performing career, none disagreed with the statement that some children are not inherently musical. Similarly, Shouldice (2009) found that many music teachers agreed with the statement “To be good at music, a person needs to have a talent for music.” One teacher expressed the belief that “to be truly musical I think is a gift” (p. 148), while another stated, “Some people *can't* be ... ‘a musician’ because they might not have that talent” (p. 133).

Because a person’s beliefs and actions are inextricably intertwined, music teachers’ beliefs about talent are likely to have an impact on what they choose to do and how they interact with students in the music classroom. For example, Chiodo (2001) cited beliefs about talent as one reason why many music teachers are opposed to assessing students in music class. These teachers may not want to “spoil the students’ enjoyment by grading them or discourage those students who tried hard but lacked the talent to really excel in music” (p. 18). Not only may music teachers’ beliefs about students’ musical abilities influence their beliefs about assessment/evaluation (Lane, 2007; Niebur, 1997; Salvador, 2011; Shih, 1997; Talley, 2005), but they may also underpin their views of the very purpose for their music programs (Carter, 1986;

Rasor, 1988; Salvador, 2011), such as whether their main goal is “to create a learning environment that will not only develop the talents of the musically gifted but will develop aesthetic musical responsiveness in all students” (Carter, 1986, p. 76) or to develop functional musical skills in all students. These beliefs about purpose suggest different underlying beliefs about musical ability that are important to investigate because, according to Nespor (1987), “if we are interested in *why* teachers organize and run classrooms as they do we must pay much more attention to the goals they pursue” and the ways in which these goals are informed by “their subjective interpretations of classroom processes” (p. 325), including those pertaining to students’ musical ability or “talent.”

Talent is only one way in which a person might conceive of musical ability; in fact, much ambiguity exists in terminology used to describe musical ability and the various ways in which people can be musical. “The adjective ‘musical’ [itself] is often attached to a range of other terms, for example, ability (defined as capacity or power), aptitude (natural propensity or talent), talent (a special aptitude or faculty), and potential (coming into being or action, latent)” (Hallam, 2006, p. 93). Some scholars, including Seashore and Gordon (1998), have theorized that musical ability is dependent, at least to some extent, on music aptitude, one’s potential for musical achievement, which is innate and distributed normally among the population. However, the current study focuses on the conception of musical ability as a bi-modal trait, one with which some people are believed to be born while others are not; thus, the term “musical talent” will be used to refer to this conception in the current study.

Howe et al. (1998) described the concept of talent, including musical talent, as having the following properties:

- Talent is genetically transmitted.

- Talent can be detected early, before it is manifested in achievement.
- Early indications of talent can be used to predict who will excel.
- Talent is held by only a minority of the population.
- A talent is “relatively domain-specific” (p. 400).

However, Howe and others (Howe et al., 1998; Sloboda, 1996; Sloboda et al., 1994) present an argument against the “talent account” of musical ability for the following reasons:

- All humans have “receptive” musical skills, indicating that all have the potential for musical ability.
- There are not typically signs of talent in early childhood.
- Even those believed to be “talented” have to work very hard.
- Although some believe one’s level of music aptitude to be innate, one’s actualized musical achievement or ability is not inherited or related to genetics.
- “In some non-Western cultures musical achievements are much more widespread” (Sloboda et al., 1994, p. 349).

Ethnomusicological Studies of Musical Talent

While Western culture relies heavily on the notion of musical talent, much literature in the field of ethnomusicology suggests that the notion of talent is not universal (Merriam, 1964). There are many cultures in which the concept of talent is noticeably absent, despite the fact that all cultures have some form of music. Cultures with no concept of talent can be found in various places around the world, including Africa, Europe, Oceania, South America, and even the United States.

The most well-known ethnomusicological work negating a universal concept of musical talent is that of John Blacking (Blacking, 1967, 1971, 1973, 1987; Campbell, 1999; Howard &

Blacking, 1991). While studying the Venda people of South Africa, Blacking noticed that virtually all of them were musically competent, including the children. Blacking discovered that the Venda assumed that all people are musical, noting the Venda belief “that every Venda is capable of musical performance, unless he is totally deaf” (Blacking, 1971, p.25). In Venda culture, all children are brought up to be musical through the process of enculturation. The Venda adults see it as their duty to guide and encourage all children to become participants in the musical culture. Blacking found that, while the Venda do acknowledge that some may have “exceptional” musical ability, they believe that social factors play the most important part in developing it and that young children show remarkable musical ability when they are in a stimulating, encouraging musical environment.

Messenger discovered similar findings among the Anang people of Nigeria (Merriam, 1964; Messenger, 1958; Messenger, 1971; Messenger & Messenger, 1981). While conducting fieldwork there, Messenger was struck by the “apparent lack of tone-deafness” (Messenger, 1958, p. 20) and was amazed by the musical abilities of the Anang, even the children. Messenger claims that he could not find a person who was “non-musical” and, like Blacking, theorized that the Anang all develop into musically competent adults by being exposed to and encouraged to participate in music as young children. Messenger speculates that, rather than having an exclusionary concept of talent, the Anang conceive of musical talent as “certain capabilities which anyone can develop” (Messenger, 1958, p. 23) and that all are born with “equal inherent talent for aesthetic activity” (Merriam, 1964, p. 67). Like the Venda, the Anang acknowledge that a few may show superior ability, but they do not believe that any lack the “requisite abilities” to become musical participants. Other African cultures that treat music-

making as a part of daily life and believe that anyone can be an active musical participant include the Baoule of the Ivory Coast (Thurow, 1956) and the Sotho in Lesotho (Levitin, 2006).

Africa is not the only continent in which the absence of a concept of musical talent has been observed. Merriam's (1967) study of the Flathead Indians in western Montana revealed a belief that all are capable of being good singers. Singing is a natural part of everyday life for the Flathead Indians, and few, if any, would say that they are unable to sing. While some may be seen as outstanding musicians, this does not prevent the majority of the Flathead people from making music as a normal part of life. Marshall (1977, 1982) found something similar among the Debarcani, Macedonian peasants living in Yugoslavia. Music is a significant part of Debarcani social life, yet music is not "taught" in Debarca. Rather, it is learned through exposure, listening, and imitating, similar to the enculturation process described by Blacking. Marshall (1982) reports that the people he spoke with in Debarca "said that the best way to learn music is to expose oneself to it and listen as much as possible; that, along with a desire to learn and regular practice, is enough to make one proficient" (p. 168). The Debarcani believe that musical talent is distributed equally to all and that the difference between a good musician and a poorer one is simply differences in their motivation. "Differences in skill are recognized, and are attributed either to differences in innate physical capacities or (more often) to differences in players' desires to practice and increase their skill; but there is no feeling that skill is something certain people are born with, and no indication that superior musicians have a better understanding of music" (Marshall, 1977, p. 118).

Several researchers observed a connection between the absence of a concept of musical talent and a more egalitarian society. Turino (1989) described the inclusion of all individuals in the musical practices of the Aymara people in southern Peru. The Aymara society is highly

egalitarian, valuing the collective over the individual. This lack of hierarchy enables any male to participate in the Aymara instrumental music practice, regardless of playing ability, because it would not be socially appropriate for the Aymara to make public judgments of one another's skills. Thus all males are allowed to participate in the instrumental ensembles as equals with the other group members, rather than being excluded due to lack of "talent." In studying the egalitarian society of the Kaluli in Papua New Guinea, Feld (1984, 1990) observed that the belief that all are assumed to have equal social potential is carried over into their musical practices. In Kaluli culture, it is assumed that everyone will become a competent music maker and that the acquisition of musical skill is developed from childhood through adult input and interaction. Like the Debarcani, the Kaluli view differences in musical ability as the result of differences in interest.

Recently, several studies have been published in education journals that examine the concept of musical ability through an ethnomusicological lens. Russell (1997) studied the widespread singing ability in Fiji and found that singing is a natural part of everyday social life. Because few Fijians owned devices for listening to recorded music, they were more inclined to make music themselves. Russell found that Fijian children are "socialized" into the musical culture of singing from a young age and that they "internalize" the practice of singing by observing and participating. Koops (2010) discovered a similar musical socialization (or enculturation) process among the "Baatikunda," her pseudonym for a community in The Gambia. Children in this culture learn music through immersion, by informally listening and imitating from an early age. Additionally, Koops observed that there was an "expectation to be musical" among the Baatikunda. They believe that music is an important part of life for all people and that everyone has musical ability. Similarly, in a study of the Wagogo people of

Tanzania, Mapana (2011) found that children come to understand that “music is something they do” and that they come to know music through participation alongside adults, who model and facilitate.

There are some common themes across these ethnomusicological studies that examine musical ability. One is that music and music-making are a part of daily life among those cultures. Another is that musical practices are learned through a process of immersion and enculturation, beginning at birth and continuing into adulthood. Finally, everyone participates in music making. While there are some who may be more skilled, this does not preclude or discourage everyone else from being an active, successful participant in the musical practice.

Questioning the Talent Paradigm

In Western cultures the idea of talent as an innate, natural gift that is inherited only by a minority is such a commonly held belief that few question it. However, studies in the field of ethnomusicology that focus on cultures in which there is no similar notion provide evidence that this idea is a culturally constructed concept. According to Monaghan and Just (2000), culturally constructed concepts are implicit ideas about the world around us that seem obvious and beyond question to members of a culture. These culturally constructed concepts are reinforced through frequent use in daily life and may even “naturalize things like hierarchy and even exploitation” (Monaghan & Just, p. 136). They involve that which we assume to be a “normal” part of life, and, while these concepts may seem so normal and natural that one might assume them to be universal, in actuality they may differ radically from one culture to another.

Even so fundamental a facet of our experience of life as our concepts of who and what we are, concepts that seem to constitute a primary basis for common sense, are in fact subject to extraordinary variation. . . . This, in turn has profound consequences for the

ways in which societies are constituted socially, economically, and morally. (Monaghan & Just, p. 132)

In his ethnography of conservatory culture, Kingsbury (1988) deconstructs the Western notion of musical talent. Kingsbury argues that, while talent is typically understood as residing (or not residing) within a person, it is actually a judgment made about that person by someone else. To be perceived as having “talent,” a person must be deemed “talented” by an expert, and this judgment only happens after the “talent” has manifested itself. Therefore, talent is not a reality in itself but rather a judgment made based on one’s perception of reality. In other words, musical talent is a culturally constructed concept. If we consider the idea of innate musical talent to be a culturally constructed concept, it could be re-conceptualized as a belief rather than a given fact or absolute truth.

Characteristics of Beliefs

Richardson (1996) defines beliefs as “psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (p. 103). Beliefs are held in groups, or systems, and not in isolation (Green, 1971/1998). According to Green, these belief systems have three dimensions. The first dimension pertains to their quasi-logical relation. Beliefs can be derived, meaning they originate from other beliefs, or primary, meaning there is no further justification in any other belief. The second dimension of belief systems concerns the psychological strength of beliefs. Beliefs held with the greatest strength are known as core beliefs and are least likely to change, while beliefs held with less strength are peripheral beliefs and are more open to debate. Green’s third dimension of belief systems is that beliefs are held in clusters that can be isolated from other clusters. Thus a person can hold contradictory belief systems if those beliefs are never examined in relation to one another.

There has been much variability in the use of the term “beliefs,” resulting in confusion about exactly what constitutes a belief (Pajares, 1992). Many authors define beliefs by contrasting them with knowledge. Nespor (1987) postulated four features that distinguish beliefs from other forms of knowledge: existential presumption, alternativity, affective and evaluative loading, and episodic structure. Existential presumption refers to ideas that a person presumes exist and includes embodied entities, such as ability or laziness. An example of existential presumption in music education is the belief that musical ability is a “talent” that some naturally have and others do not. Alternativity “refers to conceptualization of ideal situations differing significantly from present realities” (Nespor, 1987, p. 319). When a music teacher makes a belief statement such as, “If only I had new instruments, I would be able to teach my students better,” they are demonstrating alternativity. Affective and evaluative loading pertains to the involvement of feelings and values in beliefs, which often influences how and to what extent a music teacher covers certain content. Episodic storage refers to memory organization of beliefs “in terms of personal experiences, episodes or events” (Nespor, 1987, p. 320). A music teacher recalling a memory of a lesson in which he or she learned a new technique perceived to be positive is an example of episodic storage.

Many authors characterize beliefs as based on subjective judgments, as opposed to knowledge, which is based on objective facts (Pajares, 1992). “A belief is held as truth by one holding this belief and does not require external validation or evidence of truth. Knowledge does” (Thompson, 2007, p. 31). This distinction of knowledge as objective and beliefs as subjective has been criticized, because it implies the existence of absolute and universal truth, which Postmodernists would argue is not possible. “The conception of knowledge as somehow purer than belief and closer to the truth or falsity of a thing requires a mechanistic outlook not

easily digested” (Pajares, 1992, p. 310). The result is that there is no simple way of defining beliefs.

While Pajares (1992) criticizes many of the distinctions made between beliefs and knowledge, he offers a list of fundamental assumptions that can be made about beliefs. One fundamental assumption about beliefs is that they have “an adaptive function in helping individuals define and understand the world and themselves” (p. 325). This is due in large part to the ways in which the affective, evaluative nature of beliefs causes them to function as a “filter” through which all new experiences are interpreted. This “filtering effect” of beliefs “ultimately screens, redefines, distorts, or reshapes subsequent thinking and information processing” (p. 325). Beliefs not only act as a filter for experience and interpretation in our daily lives, but they also frame situations and problems and guide our intention and action (Fives & Buehl, 2012). “Individuals’ beliefs strongly affect their behavior” (p. 326). Additionally, there is a reciprocal relationship between beliefs and actions. “Beliefs are thought to drive actions; however, experiences and reflection on action may lead to changes in and/or additions to beliefs” (Richardson, 1996, p. 104). Regardless of whether beliefs are influencing actions or vice versa, “our actions cannot be considered apart from beliefs—they are intermingled” (Thompson, 2007, p. 30).

The Impact of Teacher Beliefs

Because of the unavoidable link between beliefs and actions, the study of teachers’ beliefs has been regarded as an important topic in the field of education (Ernest, 1989; Fives & Buehl, 2008; Kagan, 1992; Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Rath, 2001; Richardson, 1996; Thompson, 2007; Vartuli, 2005). Teacher beliefs are “generally defined as pre- or inservice teachers’ implicit assumptions about students, learning, classrooms, and the subject matter to be

taught” (Kagan, 1992, pp. 65-66). Teachers’ beliefs about teaching, learning, and their subject matter have an inevitable impact on what they choose to do in the classroom, which in turn has an impact on the learning experiences of their students (Ernest, 1989). Thompson (2007) posits, “Teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ actions in classrooms cannot be separated” (p. 30). The beliefs of teachers may be overt and consciously influence their decisions and behaviors, but just as often they are implicit and unarticulated, guiding teachers’ actions in ways of which they may not even be aware (Ernest, 1989; Vartuli, 2005).

One powerful subset of teachers’ beliefs are those relating to their own self-efficacy as teachers (Kagan, 1992; Vartuli, 2005). Whether teachers believe they can help a student succeed will have an impact on the time and effort they put into doing so. Teachers with high self-efficacy for teaching see all children, even those with lower abilities, “as reachable, teachable, and worthy of the attention and effort it takes to help them learn,” which, in turn, “has an important positive influence on children's self-perceptions about academic outcomes and achievement” (Vartuli, 2005, p. 77).

While this seems to suggest that teachers’ self-efficacy determines their perceptions of students’ abilities to learn, the reverse may also be true. It is possible that teachers’ beliefs about students’ abilities to learn may be the basis for their feelings of self-efficacy as teachers. Thus, one of the significant ways in which teachers’ beliefs may affect their classroom practice is that of their expectations for students, particularly student learning and success, and the ways in which these beliefs are communicated to students. “The early school years are an important formative period when children's beliefs about their intellectual abilities are based on academic expectations and ability evaluations conveyed by their teachers” (Vartuli, 2005, p. 77).

Attribution theory posits that both teachers and students may view the causes for student success or failure in terms of whether these causes are stable, controllable, and internal or external (Asmus, 1994; Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, & Pintrich, 2011; Maehr, Pintrich, & Linnenbrink, 2002; Smith, 2011). These dimensions combine to form specific attributions such as effort (internal/unstable), ability (internal/stable), task difficulty (external/stable), and luck (external/unstable) (Austin, Renwick, & McPherson, 2006). According to Rath (2001):

Research on attribution theories demonstrates that the attributions that teachers make to their pupils who are doing poorly may reflect their beliefs but also hinder their effective interventions with pupils. So, academic failure is often attributed to external factors in the child's life--the home, the family, the peer group--rather than reflecting on problematic teaching. (p. 2)

Similarly, when a teacher believes that a student's success or failure is the result of internal and stable factors, they may be likely to believe that their instructional efforts are futile. Thus, that teacher may not devote as much time and energy to helping that student succeed due to the belief that the student is incapable of succeeding. However, "pupils in our schools who are the targets of attributions that narrow the ways in which their learning problems are addressed are victims, one might say, of teacher belief systems" (Rath, 2001, p. 2).

The Impact of Talent Beliefs in Music Education

One of the ways in which students have been the victims of teacher belief systems in music education pertains to beliefs about musical talent. Many music educators hold the belief that musical ability depends on innate talent, to which they may attribute a student's musical success or failure (Biasutti, 2010; Brändström, 1999; Clelland, 2006; Evans et al., 2000; Hewitt, 2006; Legette, 2002, 2012; Shouldice, 2009, 2012; Thompson, 2000). Furthermore, these talent

beliefs are inevitably conveyed to and/or held by those among the general population, as well (Abril, 2007; Asmus, 1986; Burnard, 2003; Davis, 1994; Evans et al., 2000; Hallam, 2006; Hallam & Prince, 2003; Hallam & Shaw, 2002; Howe et al., 1998; Lamont, 2002; Legette, 1998; Randles, 2011; Ruddock, 2012; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Shouldice, 2013; Sloboda, 1996, 2005; Sloboda et al., 1994; Whidden, 2008, 2010). The resulting distinction that music teachers make “between ‘musical’ and ‘unmusical’ children. . . . plays a role in reinforcing differences in musical identity” among their students (Lamont, 2002, p. 46). In general, children’s views of themselves as musical deteriorate with age, while their beliefs in innate musical talent strengthen (Asmus, 1986; Lamont, 2002; Randles, 2011; Shouldice, 2013). One might assume that this is due, at least in part, to their school music experiences.

There is much evidence that suggests many students’ experiences in school music programs have a negative impact on their musical self-esteem and their views of themselves as musicians, due in large part to the labeling that happens as a result of talent beliefs (Abril, 2007; Burnard, 2003; Campbell, 2010; Lamont, 2002; Ruddock, 2012; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Whidden, 2008, 2010). Numerous studies in the field of music education tell the stories of people who were devastated as children when a teacher told them they were tone-deaf, asked them not to sing, or denied them opportunities to participate in music due to perceived lack of ability or talent (Abril, 2007; Burnard, 2003; Ruddock, 2012; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Whidden, 2008, 2010). Perceiving that they lacked musical talent and thus were “unmusical,” most of these unfortunate individuals gave up on their hopes of ever participating in music and ceased all music making in their lives.

Sadly for students such as these, it appears that judgments of musical talent are often self-fulfilling prophecies (Sloboda, 2005; Sloboda et al., 1994). If a person perceives him- or herself

as lacking talent, that perception is likely to limit his or her future musical endeavors. It also is apparent that the beliefs held by music educators about the nature and role of musical talent likely are imparted to their students, whether explicitly or implicitly, because “teachers’ beliefs about their students [sic] abilities affect their behaviour towards those children” (Sloboda, 2005, p. 300). If a teacher perceives a student as having musical talent, he or she likely will provide that student with support, encouragement, and opportunities that challenge the student and further develop his or her musical abilities. However, “when a teacher believes a child has low potential, the teacher is more likely to set the child non-challenging tasks, and give less encouragement for high expectations” (Sloboda, 2005, p. 300).

While some might argue that talent judgments enable the “talented” to excel at their strengths, this comes at a cost to others. “Self-fulfilling beliefs about the consequences of an innate gift being present are inevitably coupled with self-fulfilling beliefs about the outcome of a person lacking such a gift” (Sloboda et al., 1994, p. 349). But in the words of Blacking (1973), “Must the majority be made ‘unmusical’ so that a few may be more ‘musical’?” (p. 4).

Beliefs in musical talent that result in judgments made about whether a person is “musical” or “unmusical” are an issue of social justice. According to Monaghan and Just (2000), culturally constructed concepts have the potential to “naturalize things like hierarchy and even exploitation” (p. 136), and musical talent is an example of this. The culturally constructed concept of innate musical talent segregates people into the “musical” elite and the “unmusical” masses, but “placing inborn qualities such as innate musical ability at the forefront is equivalent to labeling an individual's musical ability based on color of skin, sex or birthplace” (Whidden, 2008, p 12). Campbell (2010) states, “Of all the phrases that have gelled into a kind of common usage, few have been as devastating to children's development as that of ‘talent’” because “it

creates images of musical participation for the very few” (p. 217). It may be for this very reason that there is so little musical achievement among our population as a whole (Sloboda, 1996) and so little respect for music education in our schools. “It seems reasonable to assume that beliefs concerning inheritance [of musical talent] may well be correlated with the extent to which the general public participates in music as well as the general importance of music in the society” (Merriam, 1964, p. 70).

This may seem discouraging for those in the music education profession, but perhaps there is a way to help alleviate these issues:

By discovering how music is created and appreciated in different social and cultural contexts, and perhaps establishing that musicality is a universal, species-specific characteristic, we can show that human beings are even more remarkable than we presently believe them to be—and not just a few human beings, but all human beings—and that the majority of us live far below our potential, because of the oppressive nature of most societies. (Blacking, 1973, pp. 115-116)

It is a given in society, and thus in schools, that virtually all individuals have the potential for language and will develop a level of linguistic competence. This becomes a reality because it is believed to be true. What if the same were said for musical competence? If society were to believe that all human beings have the potential for music and will develop a level of musical competence, would this become a reality?

Instead of the “folk psychology” of musical talent, Sloboda (1996) suggests that we take an alternative view in which “the capacity for musical accomplishment of one sort or another [is] a species-defining characteristic” (p. 108). Similarly, Campbell (2010) muses:

If we were able to accept that there may be a certain biological bent that all persons have for music ... we might then be able to conceive of musical talent in a new light. As we recognize that many of the world's societies continue to advocate the full participation of their members in musical performance and invention, we may alter our own expectations of children's musicking potential. (p. 219)

If persons all believed that every human being has the potential to be musical, would everyone become musical? Furthermore, if music teachers truly believed that each and every one of their students was capable of developing musical skills, what would the result be? How might this belief impact the classroom environment and the music learning experiences teachers provide for their students? How might teachers who hold this belief envision the broader purpose of music education?

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

With the intent of improving the musical experiences and opportunities provided to students in school music programs, the purpose of this research was to explore one elementary music teacher's beliefs about the nature of musical ability and the ways in which these beliefs relate to actions and lived experiences in the classroom. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What is the nature and extent of the beliefs about students' musical abilities and capabilities held by one elementary music teacher who believes all students have the capacity to be musical?
2. How do beliefs about musical abilities manifest themselves in this teacher's actions and decision-making in the classroom?

3. How do beliefs about musical abilities manifest themselves in this teacher's interactions with students and, more broadly, in the classroom culture she creates?
4. What is the relationship between this teacher's beliefs about musical ability and her beliefs about the purpose of music education, specifically of elementary general music?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

The current study aimed to investigate teacher beliefs regarding musical ability and the ways in which these beliefs relate to classroom practice as well as the effects of these beliefs on classroom culture. Therefore, this literature review will focus on three main areas. First, I will discuss existing research literature pertaining to beliefs about musical ability, specifically in terms of talent. This will include studies of both non-Western and Western cultures and the effects of talent beliefs in these cultures as well as talent beliefs held by music teachers. Next, I will discuss studies from the general education literature that have examined teacher beliefs and their connections to teaching practice. Finally, I will discuss studies from the music education literature exploring music teacher beliefs and the ways in which these beliefs relate to music teaching practice.

Beliefs About Musical Ability/Talent

Much existing research has examined beliefs about musical ability held by the general population and by music teachers. Several studies have explored the beliefs of universal musical ability in non-Western cultures. In contrast, many studies of Western cultures have found belief in a conception of musical ability characterized by the bi-modal trait of inborn musical talent and that this belief can negatively affect the ways in which persons engage musically. Other studies have shown that many music teachers also believe in the concept of selective musical talent.

Talent Beliefs Held by the General Population

Several studies have been conducted that examine cultures in which every person is considered and brought up to be musical. The most well-known of these is Blacking's study of the Venda people of South Africa (Blacking, 1967, 1971, 1973, 1987; Campbell, 1999; Howard & Blacking, 1991). Blacking found that the Venda assumed that all people are musical and

observed that virtually all of them were musically competent. In Venda culture, all children are brought up to be musical through the process of enculturation, supported by the guidance and encouragement of adults to become participants in the musical culture. Although the Venda do acknowledge that some may have “exceptional” musical ability, they believe that social factors are the most powerful factor in developing it.

Mapana (2011) examined the musical practices among the Wagogo people of Tanzania and found that Wagogo children experienced an “early musical education” in the form of observing and participating alongside adults in various social events that involved music. Children in Wagogo culture are “enculturated” into the practices of music-making by imitating the singing, dancing, and playing of adults. Mapana observed that, in one tradition called *mapelembo*, “there was no designated solo singer ... and anyone who wished could sing a story,” and all children were considered full participants in this tradition (p. 343).

In an attempt to understand the widespread part-singing ability among people in Fiji, Russell (1997) studied the musical practices of singing in Fiji and the values and beliefs underlying these practices. Russell observed that singing was a significant part of social life in Fiji in which all people participate. It appears that Fijian children are “socialized” into the practice of singing from an early age, and they “internalize the practices and the language of part-singing by witnessing and participating in important cultural rituals in a variety of social contexts” (p. 105). Russell concludes that “Fijians, through their various musical practices ... , develop the singing talents of the members of their communities in a widespread way by providing a ‘place’ for every voice.” (p. 107).

In an ethnographic study of children’s music-making in The Gambia, Koops (2010) observed a similar “place” for every voice. Koops spent 3 months in a community, which she

gives the pseudonym “Baatiikunda,” observing the musical behaviors of children (ages 5-13) and interviewing children, siblings, parents, and teachers. Koops discovered that, rather than through formal instruction, children in Baatiikunda learned music through immersion in the musical practices of their culture and informally observing and imitating the music-making of adults and other children in the community. Koops also noted that many adults “expressed the belief that music is an important part of life for all people in The Gambia” and that “all have musical ability” (p. 29). Furthermore, Koops observed that there was an “expectation to be musical” among the Baatiikunda people. In Baatiikunda, it is expected that all children will use and make music.

These studies on beliefs of universal musical ability held in non-Western cultures are relevant to the current study for several reasons. Similar to Koops’ (2010) finding of an “expectation to be musical,” I will explore the ways in which my participant believes her students can and will be musical and how this relates to her teaching practice and the ways in which she interacts with students as well as her beliefs about the purpose of her music program. Because these studies all highlight the importance of the musical “socialization” or “enculturation” process, the current study will look for evidence of these music-learning processes in the classroom of the participant. Finally, the ability of these ethnographic studies to shed light on musical cultures and practices within those cultures suggests that the use of ethnographic techniques will be useful in the current study, as it will examine classroom culture in relation to teacher beliefs.

Numerous studies have examined the beliefs about musical ability and/or talent held by the general population in Western cultures and the ways in which these beliefs affect musical participation and musical self-esteem. Hallam and Prince (2003) explored the ways in which

different groups of people in the United Kingdom conceptualized musical ability. The researchers surveyed 129 musicians, 80 educators in fields other than music, 112 adults outside education, 60 students “actively involved in extra-curricular music making,” and 34 students who were not (p. 5). Participants responded to the open-ended prompt, “Musical ability is,” and two judges independently analyzed their responses, from which six categories emerged: aural skills, receptive responses to music, generative activities, integration of a range of skills, personal qualities, and origins of musical ability. “Responses which acknowledged that musical ability was innate tended to accept that everyone has some musical ability but went further to indicate that some people have a greater ability than others” (p. 13).

Hallam and Prince (2003) claimed that the findings did not show “a general conception of musical ability as genetically determined” (p. 13). However, only three participants stated belief that musicality is learned, while 38 stated it is innate and 36 that it is innate and learned. Specific responses also provided a clearer picture of beliefs. One educator said, “Music ability is very special, with only a minority of gifted people having real ability,” while another stated that musical ability is “an innate bias towards music –a talent which enables them to learn how to play a musical instrument/sing much more easily than others” (p. 16). One adult non-musician/non-educator believed that “lots of people are gifted in music when they are born” (p. 16), and another commented, “True musical ability is a ‘natural talent’” (p. 16). Among the responses published by the authors, it seemed that more musicians mentioned the perception that everyone is musical but that musical ability depends on the environment. For example, one musician said, “I think that everyone has musical ability but that the social environment has a great influence in the development of it” (p. 16). Hallam and Prince found that significantly more musicians than the other groups mentioned that musical ability involves progression and

development.

Hallam and Shaw (2002) created a survey based on the findings of Hallam and Prince (2003) to explore further whether different groups of people held different conceptions of musical ability. Hallam and Shaw surveyed 55 musicians, 80 educators (non-musicians), 20 adults “with grade 6 or above on a musical instrument,” 106 adults “with grade 5 or below,” 47 adults with no music involvement, 135 students with more than 2 years of musical experience, 33 students with more than 2 years, and 14 students with no extra-curricular music experience. The survey consisted of statements describing musical ability (e.g., “Musical ability is being able to play by ear.”) to which respondents indicated their agreement on a five-point scale. While the mean agreement with the views that musical ability is learned ($M = 3.4$) and is developed through experience ($M = 3.63$) were higher than mean agreement with the view that musical ability is innate ($M = 3.19$), the mean agreement with the view that musical ability is innate is still fairly high. Additionally, Hallam and Shaw found no significant differences among the beliefs between groups. However, it should be noted that “the forced choice methodology elicited responses to statements which in the previous study [Hallam & Prince] had not been generated by all the groups” (p. 107), resulting in less variability across groups and imposing ideas that the participants may not have mentioned on their own. Allowing participants to express their beliefs freely, without imposed categories or restrictions, would enable a more authentic depiction of their beliefs.

Davis (1994) surveyed a sample of 141 “non-musicians,” consisting of 19 educational psychologists, 53 secondary teachers, 50 primary teachers, and 19 other adults. Davis presented the respondents with a list of 29 activities (which included things like typing, acting, motor-racing, and playing chess) and asked them to indicate which of those activities required “natural

talent” or a “gift” in order for an individual to achieve at a high level. Of the 141 participants, well over 75% believed that composing, singing, and playing concert instruments each require inborn talent. These percentages were much higher than most of the other activities on the list with the exception of art, which 86% of respondents indicated required talent. However, the restrictive nature of the survey resulted in what may be an overly simplistic representation of the respondents’ beliefs about musical ability. The qualitative nature of the current study will enable a rich, in-depth investigation of a single participant’s beliefs.

While Davis (1994) studied beliefs of both adults and children, Asmus (1986) studied only children, eliciting beliefs about musical talent in a study of 589 students in grades 4 to 12 at eight different schools. The students completed a form for which they were asked to “state five reasons why some students do well in music and five reasons why some students do not do well in music” (p. 266), the responses to which were classified by three judges according to attribution theory. Of the 5,092 total attributions made by the students, 42.94% were in the internal-stable category, which was the most commonly cited attribution type and focused primarily on innate talent. Asmus observed that “society as a whole promotes the use of internal-stable attributions for musical achievement. Statements frequently made about those who are successful in music include ‘She has the gift of music’ and ‘He is musically talented,’ which emphasize internal-stable attributions” (p. 268). Asmus also found a significant grade level effect, indicating that, as grade level increased, internal-stable attributions increased while internal-unstable attributions (effort) decreased. While younger students believed effort was more important to musical success, older students were more likely to cite talent, which Asmus suggests “may be a function of learning both in the music class and in life” (p. 271).

Randles (2011) also discovered ways in which children's perceptions and beliefs about musical ability change over time. In a survey of 1,219 students in grades 4 through 12 in one school district, participants responded to the prompt, "A good musician is someone who..." Randles then identified 14 response categories, categorized the student responses, and tallied the number of each response category at each grade level. This analysis revealed that "performs/practices an instrument" was the most frequent response given at all grade levels. However, there were subtle shifts in the frequency of the categories across grade levels. For example, effort was the second most frequently cited category in grades 4, 5, 6, and 7 but was mentioned less frequently in grades 8, 9, and 10 and did not appear in the top five categories in grades 11 and 12. Additionally, Randles asked the students whether they viewed themselves as good musicians and found that students' perceptions of themselves as being good musicians decreased as grade level increased.

Shouldice (2013) replicated Randles' (2011) study in order to examine young children's definitions of what it means to be a good musician and their perceptions of themselves as good musicians. She conducted oral survey interviews with 347 students in grades 1 through 4 at two elementary schools in one Midwestern school district. After transcribing the interviews, Shouldice coded the transcripts for emerging characteristics among the students' responses and calculated the frequencies of those characteristics at each grade level, resulting in findings similar to those of Randles. There was a statistically significant difference in students' perceptions of themselves as good musicians by grade level: students in grade 1 rated themselves as better musicians than did students in grades 2 through 4, suggesting that, even at the elementary school level, students' perceptions of themselves as good musicians decrease as they get older.

These studies show that many people in Western cultures conceive of musical ability in the form of bi-modal talent, which is present in some and not in others, as well as providing evidence that many persons' views of themselves as musical or being a "good musician" deteriorate with time. However, few studies have examined Western beliefs about a universal conception of musical ability. The current study will explore the nature of these beliefs held by one music teacher and the ways in which these beliefs relate to what she does in the classroom. The previously cited studies of talent beliefs are relevant to the current study because they suggest that a freer, more open-ended exploration of ability beliefs will allow for a richer, more in-depth picture of the participant's beliefs than do more closed-ended data collection techniques, such as surveys.

Effects of Talent Beliefs

Studies of non-Western cultures have provided evidence that the belief in universal musical ability may result in all members of a culture becoming competent musical participants (Blacking, 1967, 1971, 1973, 1987; Koops, 2010; Mapana, 2011; Russell, 1997). Existing research on beliefs about musical talent held in Western cultures, however, suggest drastically different effects. These studies have shown that the belief in bi-modal musical talent can affect persons' musical engagement and participation in negative ways.

Several studies have focused specifically on the general population's beliefs about what it means to be musical and whether persons perceive themselves as musical, with somewhat discouraging results. Burnard (2003) interviewed two 12-year-old children, two music specialist teachers, and six generalist teachers on musicality and what it means to be musical. One participant, "James," recalls that he had not perceived his level of musicianship as being high as a child, but after his music teacher started giving him special attention and encouragement, he

says, “I started seeing myself as a performer and musician” (p. 31). However, several other participants recalled memories in which they had received the message as a child that they were not musical. “Amanda” claimed that it was “made perfectly clear” to her when she was in primary school that she could not sing, declaring that she sees herself “as one of the unlucky amongst us who are totally unmusical” (p. 32). “Luynda” recalled a time as a child when she was told by her music teacher that she was tone-deaf, at which point she stopped singing and playing recorder and says she “lost any musical confidence [she] may have had” (p. 33). Burnard suggests that studies are needed to shed light on “how teachers and pupils come to perceive themselves and label others as ‘musical’, ‘unmusical’, ‘musician’ or ‘nonmusician’” (p. 36) and that we “advocate the importance of developing positive musical identities at an early age [so that we can] ensure that all children have a consistent and equitable opportunity to learn about and do music” (p. 36).

In a case study of four Australian adults, Ruddock and Leong (2005) sadly found results similar to those of Burnard (2003). Ruddock and Leong chose participants who perceived themselves as “unmusical,” and the focus of the study was to examine their beliefs about what it means to be musical, what factors contributed to this belief, and how this belief affects their involvement with music. The researchers interviewed each participant, along with talking to them on the telephone and collecting their written comments. One participant, “Nell,” believed that being musical involves understanding music, but she felt music was like a “foreign language” and just “couldn’t grasp it,” referring to music as “magic” and “a very difficult thing to do.” “Harry” referred to being musical as something “one is or isn’t” and believed that it takes a “naturally talented” person to succeed at performing music; he saw himself as being musical in terms of appreciating music but not in terms of playing or having musical talent.

Another participant, “Ada,” had grown up in Croatia, where she said music was a “normal, everyday aspect of living.” She recalled that, in Croatia, she considered herself and everyone around her to be musical, but her perception of her own musicality changed after she moved to Australia, where she began formal singing instruction and gradually came to see herself as having inferior musical skills. Ruddock and Leong concluded that music education needs to address three issues: (a) how “formal music learning could lead to a self-view of being *unmusical*,” (b) the belief that “singing or expressing [oneself] *musically* is not a social norm, and (c) the “fear of being heard and judged as *unmusical*” (p. 20).

Ruddock (2012) later conducted a narrative study of 20 persons who considered themselves to be “non-musicians.” Similar to the findings of Ruddock and Leong (2005), many participants in Ruddock’s study believed musical ability to be a result of an “inherent gift” possessed by only a few. One man stated, “People are born musical or not musical. . . . born with a gift. Sort of in your blood” (p. 216). Also similar to Ruddock and Leong’s findings, Ruddock found that some participants had developed their “non-musical” self-perception as a result of experiences in school music. For example, one woman recalled, “I first realized that I couldn’t sing when I was never picked for singing at school” (p. 215).

Through focusing on people’s perceptions of themselves as singers or “non-singers,” several other studies have discovered the impact of beliefs about talent. Abril (2007) investigated the experiences of three women who were enrolled in an elementary music methods course for non-music majors but had claimed that they “had little or no musical talent or ability.” The study lasted 10 weeks and included interviews, journals, and email correspondence. Abril found that all three participants recalled negative musical experiences from their childhood, during which they received the implicit message from their music teachers that they were not

musical. In discussing these incidents, one participant expressed the belief that “the ability to make music is something that comes to you when you are really young ... you just have it or you don’t” (p. 8). Another participant, “Melissa,” recalled a time when she didn’t make the cut to be in sixth grade choir: “I quit singing after that because I figured all these people must be right about me—my music teacher was the expert” (p. 6). Another participant, “Joan,” said that, as a child, she believed “she lacked ‘musical talent’” and thus “was convinced she was incapable of singing.” Joan, who believed that her negative childhood experiences with music “stifled” her, stated, “I don’t think [music] teachers realize the great impact they have” (p. 10). Abril concludes, “Teachers that propel the notion that singing ability is an inborn trait, which should be reserved for the talented few, may end up contributing to a society in which self-identified ‘non-singers’ experience singing anxiety and choose not to participate in music” (p. 13).

In another study of adults who identified themselves as non-singers, Whidden (2008, 2010) found results similar to those of Abril (2007). Through narrative inquiry Whidden studied the experiences of 12 Canadian individuals (ages 27-67), and, in addition to interviewing the participants, she engaged them in six private singing sessions. In speaking with the participants, Whidden found that negative childhood experiences with singing at school, often when attempts to sing were criticized by a teacher, were powerful factors in their self-perceptions as non-singers, along with a resignation to the culturally accepted concept of singer as someone who has an innate ability. Whidden describes a common “vicious circle” that ensued when the participants were young: a negative experience with singing discouraged the children from singing and caused them to avoid participating in singing, which then prevented them from developing their singing skills.

Despite finding that all of the participants could, in fact, match pitch and execute rhythms and observing attitude shift for many of the participants, Whidden (2008, 2010) noted that only three of them changed their identity to “singer” by the end of the study, indicating that the other participants’ deep-seated “non-singer” beliefs were resistant to change. Whidden suggests that music educators consider the powerful influence of the music teacher, the importance of positive early experiences with singing, and helping students see that singing skills can be developed rather than being innate abilities. Whidden avers that “the concept of exclusion within the music education curricula needs to be addressed” (2008, p. 12) and that “music education needs to look critically at its curricula and current practices of interaction between students and teachers to ensure that the stories that are told by [these self-perceived non-singers] do not repeat themselves in the future” (2008, p. 13).

Based on these findings about the ramifications of talent beliefs, it is clear that beliefs about talent affect the ways in which persons engage (or do not engage) with music and have a significant impact on whether and how persons develop musically. These studies on the effects of talent beliefs illuminate the current study because they suggest possible outcomes that result from beliefs about musical talent, and I will need to consider all of these possible outcomes in my own research. This will be important as I examine and try to understand the classroom culture I will observe in my research setting and how this culture might be connected to the teacher’s beliefs about musical ability and her resultant actions in the classroom.

Talent Beliefs Held by Music Teachers

Existing research also shows that many music teachers believe in the concept of bi-modal musical talent. Through the lens of attribution theory, Legette (2002) examined the factors to which pre-service teachers attributed musical success or failure. A sample of 258 undergraduate

students, comprised of 121 music education majors and 137 elementary education majors at a university in the southeastern United States, completed the Music Attribution Orientation Scale, which consisted of 35 items related to 5 subscales (effort, background, classroom environment, musical ability, and affect for music) for which students rated importance. After Legette calculated the scores (35 possible points for each subscale), results indicated that respondents ranked effort ($M = 31.33$) and musical ability ($M = 30.61$) the highest in terms of their importance for success or failure in music. In a similar study of the beliefs of 309 in-service music teachers, Legette (2012) found that, on average, they also most attributed musical success or failure to effort and musical ability, and no significant differences existed between the beliefs of elementary, middle, and high school teachers.

Hewitt (2006) explored the beliefs of eight Scottish secondary music teachers regarding the factors they believed were the causes of individual differences in music learning. Hewitt asked each participant to sort a set of 20 statements according to their significance for the participants' own teaching approaches and again according to the level of musical achievement he or she might expect from a student who exemplified each statement. Principal Components Analysis revealed that the participants fell into three clusters of beliefs: those who believed extensive prior experience and learning style were most important, those who believed that high motivation and independence were significant, and those who believed musical skill and musical talent were critical factors. Results of the second sort also revealed a belief among some teachers that having a high level of musical talent was a factor in reaching maximum achievement. However, one must be cautious in interpreting these results due to the small sample size and the fact that participants were forced to rank items, which may not have accurately reflected the nuances of their beliefs. Exploring beliefs in a more open-ended,

informal manner might provide greater insight, because it would enable the study of participants' beliefs in a way that more richly describes their lived experiences and the inner meanings they construct as a result of those experiences and beliefs.

Brändström (1999) investigated beliefs about musical ability by examining the ways in which music teachers defined musicality in a two-part study. The first phase involved 24 music teachers, whom Brändström asked to write a response to the question, "What is musicality for you?" The second phase of the study involved qualitative interviews with four music teachers and four music teacher educators. Analysis revealed that the participants held two main conceptions of musicality: a relativistic view and an absolute view. Those who held a relativistic view of musicality believed that all human beings are musical, while those who held absolute views believed that musicality is biologically inherited and "reserved for a minority of individuals" (p. 23). Unfortunately, Brändström did not indicate which view was more prevalent or to what degree, simply stating that "it is not a question of either-or but both" (pp. 23-24). However, Brändström does speculate the following:

The knowledge gaps that may appear in our schools through music teachers' more or less conscious elitist approaches to musicality is, to put it mildly, a significantly more serious problem than one or two wrong notes. A broken musical self-confidence is hard to restore. (p. 24)

A study by Evans, Bickel, and Pendarvis (2000) showed that many music teachers hold a belief in innate musical talent. Evans et al. surveyed 125 students participating in the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, as well as 123 of their parents and 88 of their music teachers, about their beliefs regarding the students' musical abilities. Survey results indicated that not only were the students

convinced that their musical development was due to innate musical talent, but their music teachers also believed that talent was a significant factor in the students' musical development.

In a survey of instrumental music teachers, Clelland (2006) found similar yet more mixed results. She surveyed 80 teachers concerning their beliefs about musical ability and examined the results according to three categories of teachers: those who originally chose a teacher career, those who entered teaching from a performing career, and those who entered teaching from a non-musical career. While those who entered teaching from non-musical careers “seem to reject the notion of musical ability as ‘special’” (p. 37), the other two groups had different beliefs. Among the participants who originally chose teaching as a career, 66% believed musical ability was inherited, and 80% of participants who entered teaching from a performing career also held this belief. Additionally, virtually all of the participants who entered teaching from a performing career agreed that some children are not inherently musical; “there were none among the performers who disagreed” (p. 37). Clelland surmises that a teacher's view of students' musical ability “is important because it underpins expectations and has a subconscious effect on how [he or she] behave[s],” which in turn subtly conveys those beliefs to students through actions, speech, and even body language (p. 39).

Several other studies also highlight differing teacher beliefs about the nature of musical ability. Biasutti (2010) surveyed 177 Italian trainee teachers using the Music Abilities Beliefs Questionnaire and the Music Learning Beliefs Questionnaire. Of the total sample, 92 were enrolled in a graduate degree program to become primary school teachers, and 85 were enrolled in postgraduate school to become secondary music teachers. Biasutti found statistically significant differences between the beliefs of the primary teachers and those of the secondary teachers, suggesting that the primary teachers tended to see musical ability as more fixed than the

secondary teachers and that the primary teachers may believe that lack of talent or giftedness would make it difficult to acquire musical skills. However, because the primary teachers did not specialize in music while the secondary group did, it is difficult to ascertain whether the differences were a result of teaching level or music specialization.

A study by Thompson (2000) focused on general beliefs of 12 entering music education students and revealed several of the participants' beliefs about musical ability. Using an open-ended questionnaire to gather preliminary data, Thompson purposefully sampled 12 college freshmen who were entering a music education program at a major university in the southwestern United States. Data sources included an initial questionnaire, audiotaped interviews, metaphorical descriptions of teaching, a "sort activity," and student interpretations of teaching cases. Thompson analyzed and interpreted the data according to a variety of belief categories, including the role of the teacher, perceptions of students, perceptions about teaching, and beliefs about the nature of music learning. When discussing his perceptions of his future students, one student expressed the belief that talent is a fixed trait and that his goal was that students develop an appreciation for music because "not all my students are going to be extremely talented. Some are [not] going to have that much talent at all" (p. 88). "Lisa" also referred to talent as "something students 'possess' rather than develop" and that she worried about "having to tell a student who 'just can't sing' that 'they just don't have it'" (p. 88). Whereas Thompson's study revealed a connection between a belief in selective, innate musical "talent" and the goal of helping students appreciate music, the current study aims to explore the ways in which the belief that all students are musical relates to one teacher's views of the purpose of her music programs.

Shouldice (2009) conducted a mixed methods investigation of teacher beliefs and their relationship to teaching practice, in which beliefs about musical talent were examined. Shouldice surveyed 37 K-12 music teachers in one Michigan school district and found that their beliefs about talent varied widely. When responding to the statement “To be good at music, a person needs to have a talent for music,” 51% of the participants agreed to some extent and 34% disagreed to some extent, while 14% were undecided. Shouldice also found a significant relationship between the belief that talent is a determinant of musical success and the extent to which teachers assessed students through their participation. “Participants who assessed more often through participation/effort tended to agree more strongly that a person needs to have a talent to be good at music” (pp. 112-113). Shouldice speculated that one possible explanation for this might be that those teachers may “not truly believe that all students are capable of achieving in music and so must assess in a way that does not focus on musical skill or ability” (p. 127).

For the qualitative part of the study, Shouldice (2009) identified, through purposeful sampling, four of the teachers who completed the survey to participate in in-depth interviews, further exploring their beliefs. When asked what it means to be a musician, “Scott,” a middle school band teacher, commented, “the students are here to learn *how* to be a musician, and eventually that will come if they have that innate talent” (p. 132). Scott also believed that not everyone has the innate capacity to be a musician: “Some people *can’t* be quote-unquote ‘a musician’ because they might not have that talent” (p. 133). Paul, a high school orchestra teacher, said:

I just think to be innately musical is a little beyond the norm. And a lot of it is genetic Everyone can get a good musical experience out of playing an instrument, whether they're innately musical or not But to be truly musical I think is a gift. (p. 148)

Perry, a middle school choir teacher, believed being musical was both nature and nurture. Yet when comparing his own musicality with that of his brothers, Perry explained, "I'm probably one of the least talented" and that he didn't "have [the] gift" of playing by ear. In contrast to Scott, Paul, and Perry is Joan, an elementary music teacher. When asked what it means to be musical, Joan stated, "I believe everybody is musical in their own way," "Every human being has music within them," and "Everyone is musical, and everyone has the potential to achieve in music" (p. 157). It is interesting that, although these four teachers all worked in the same school district, they had differing beliefs. Unfortunately, Shouldice was not able to connect their beliefs to their actual teaching practice, as she did not observe the participants working with students in their classrooms.

Shouldice (2012) later conducted a survey looking specifically at the beliefs of elementary music teachers regarding musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of music education. Of the 192 elementary music teachers surveyed, 185 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Every child can develop musical skills;" however, seven teachers did not agree, and one strongly disagreed. When presented with the statement, "Talent is necessary to develop musical skills," 15 teachers agreed or strongly agreed, and 28 were undecided. While all but six teachers agreed that "Anyone can learn music," 47 teachers did not agree with the statement, "Anyone can be good at music." Additionally, 28 teachers agreed that "A lack of talent makes it difficult for a person to acquire musical skills," and 53 were undecided. Preliminary factor analysis also suggested that elementary music teachers' beliefs about musical ability may be

related to their beliefs about whether and how students should be assessed in elementary general music.

These studies on music teachers' beliefs about musical ability are pertinent to the current study because they illustrate that, while teachers might conceive of musical ability in a variety of ways, many teachers' views of musical ability are characterized by the conception of musical talent as an inborn, bi-modal trait. However, these studies did not examine the ways in which this belief relates to actual teaching practice. In contrast, I will be looking at one teacher who does not hold this belief and the ways in which this affects her decision-making and interactions with students, something that has yet to be described in existing music education research.

Connections Between Teacher Beliefs and Practice

Numerous researchers have examined teacher beliefs, including the ways in which beliefs relate to what teachers do in the classroom with students. This research literature suggests that understanding teachers' beliefs is critical to understanding their actions and decision-making. However, virtually no studies exist in the field of music education that connect music teachers' beliefs, specifically those relating to musical ability/talent, to their teaching practice.

Teacher Beliefs and Practice in General Education

An extensive body of research exists pertaining to teacher beliefs in general education. These studies cover a wide variety of teacher beliefs, including the relation of teacher education to teacher beliefs, how beliefs might affect teaching practice, factors that affect consistency between beliefs and practice, and the ways in which teacher beliefs vary depending on teaching experience, level of students taught, and teacher perceptions of situations. While it is not within the scope of this paper to review all existing studies of teacher beliefs in general education, I will include a few that are particularly pertinent to the current study because they focus on

connections between teacher beliefs and practice as well as teacher beliefs about students' abilities.

Research that focuses on understanding teachers' interpretations of situations is an area of focus that helps to illuminate this study, because understanding those interpretations provides a context for understanding the actions of those teachers as a result of their interpretations. This link between interpretation and action was examined by Nespor (1987) in an extensive *Teacher Belief Study*. Nespor followed eight teachers throughout a semester, beginning with an interview investigating each participant's beliefs about teaching, their students, and the contexts in which they worked. Nespor then videotaped the teachers' classes and interviewed them a second time to study their explanations of their teaching practice, including their responses to the videotaped classes. The results of this study led Nespor to suggest that, "if we are interested in *why* teachers organize and run classrooms as they do we must pay much more attention to the goals they pursue... and to their subjective interpretations of classroom processes" (p. 325).

Another study that explored the relationships between teacher beliefs and teaching practice is that of Brickhouse (1990), who examined the relationship between science teachers' beliefs about the nature of science and scientific knowledge and the methods they used in their classrooms. Brickhouse used purposeful sampling to identify three secondary science teachers in the Midwest. Over a 4-month period each teacher participated in at least three hour-long interviews about their conceptions of the nature of science, their roles as teachers, and students' roles as learners and was observed in his or her classroom for at least 35 hours. Data sources also included textbooks and teachers' documents such as quizzes and worksheets. Results indicated that several of the participants' views of the nature of science were expressed in their classroom instruction and that the ways in which they believed scientific knowledge is

constructed were related to the ways they believed students should learn science. Additionally, two of the three teachers showed congruence in their beliefs and practice, while the third teacher was prevented from teaching in accordance with his beliefs due to conflict with the teaching environment. These findings likely were facilitated by the extensive data collection period and multiple sources of data, both of which are incorporated in the current study.

Van Zoest, Jones, and Thornton (1994) studied connections between beliefs and teaching practice among four pre-service mathematics teachers. Participants were four education majors who had participated in a program investigating children's mathematical understanding. Each pre-service teacher worked with pairs of first grade children three times weekly, with some of the sessions videotaped. Data were collected using a researcher-designed survey ("Beliefs About Mathematics Teaching"), interviews, and the Video Analysis Teacher Action Scale (TAS). The interviews explored the ways in which the teachers viewed their roles as teachers and what importance they placed on various student skills or teaching techniques, while the TAS was used to rate each teacher's orientation on a scale ranging from content-performance to learner-interaction based on what was observed in the videotapes.

Survey results showed significantly higher socio-constructivist beliefs in the four teachers studied than in a group of 103 other pre-service teachers who had not participated in the mentoring program, which may suggest that the mentoring experience had an impact on the teachers' beliefs. One participant stated, "The project helped make me to focus more on what *children* need to do in order to understand mathematics," while another said, "The way I was taught [in school] was to memorise facts [but] the way we are teaching in the project, the kids are learning a foundation to understand everything" (p. 47). These experiences also seemed to change the participants' views of their roles as teachers. However, analysis of the videotapes

using the TAS revealed a wider range of socio-constructivist beliefs demonstrated in teachers' actions during their work with children than stated in their interviews and surveys, suggesting that involvement in these types of program interventions may have a greater impact on stated beliefs than on what teachers actually do in the classroom with students. This finding is pertinent to the current study because, rather than relying only on the participant's stated beliefs, I will need to explore and compare both her stated beliefs and the ways in which her beliefs are enacted subconsciously in the classroom, looking for congruencies or conflicts between stated beliefs, observed beliefs, and broader actions and decision-making.

Beswick (2005) also studied the connections between teaching practice and beliefs held by mathematics teachers regarding the nature of mathematics, mathematics teaching, and mathematics learning. Beswick surveyed 25 math teachers in six secondary schools in Tasmania about their beliefs, and then each teacher administered a classroom environment survey to one or two of his or her classes. Results indicated that the teachers held a range of beliefs and fell into three "clusters": those who focused on "content and clarity," those who focused on students being "relaxed problem solvers," and those who focused on "content and understanding" (p. 52). Correlations existed between beliefs scores and years of teaching experience as well as between beliefs scores and level of education/training. Additionally, student ratings of classroom environment were related to teacher belief "clusters": classroom environments that were rated as more constructivist were more likely to have teachers who were more orientated to problem solving. However, the sample size was small for a quantitative study, and the average classroom environment scores showed little variability (with clusters only ranging from 82.8 to 85.9). Looking at the classroom environments through a qualitative lens might have provided more insight because it would have allowed a more in-depth investigation in a naturalistic setting.

Because the current study aims to explore music teacher beliefs about students' musical abilities, another pertinent area of inquiry in general education research focuses on teacher beliefs about student ability and/or effort. Anning (1988) investigated teachers' articulated beliefs about how children learn and the ways in which these beliefs about learning are connected to strategies they used in the classroom. Anning asked the participants, six elementary teachers, to select three groups of students representing a range of abilities and personality types, plan activities for those students, and then predict how they thought the students would respond to the tasks through notes and interviews. The teachers then taught the activities and viewed video footage of their teaching, discussing the learning they saw. Anning also used a Kelly Grid procedure in which she asked the teachers to describe similarities and differences among the students as learners when presented with three cards at a time, each naming a student. The participants differed in the emphasis they placed on ability, classroom behavior/work habits, social competence/personality, and out of school influences. Some teachers focused much more on ability than effort, while others focused more on effort than ability, showing differing beliefs about the impact of these factors. This is an important finding in light of the current study, which will investigate the nature of one music teacher's beliefs about students' musical abilities and capabilities, because the current study will need to explore whether this teacher attributes student success or failure to innate capacity, effort, environment, or other factors as well as how these attributions affect the teacher's subsequent actions in the classroom.

Teacher beliefs about student ability, as well as beliefs about the ways in which students with differing abilities learn, were the focus of a study by Zohar, Degani, and Vaaknin (2001). Zohar et al. interviewed 40 secondary teachers at two Israeli schools about how they would teach high- versus low-achieving students and their beliefs about the appropriateness of asking those

types of students to engage in higher order thinking. The researchers found that some teachers (45% of the sample) consistently distinguished between high- and low-achieving students and believed that higher order thinking was less appropriate for low-achieving students, with one teacher commenting that she believed this because those students “lack necessary intellectual abilities” (p. 475). However, another group of teachers did not consistently distinguish between high- and low-achieving students as related to the appropriateness of higher order thinking. One teacher from this group stated that low-achieving students “were indeed capable of more than he had ever thought possible before” (p. 476). Furthermore, teachers’ beliefs about low-achieving students and higher order thinking skills seemed to be connected to their general beliefs about teaching and learning. These findings are relevant to the current research, which aims to investigate the relationships between one music teacher’s beliefs about students’ musical abilities and the ways in which this relates to her beliefs about the purpose of music education and the ways in which she interacts with students. Just as Zohar et al. found that teachers may not consistently distinguish between students’ ability levels, I will need to compare the statements that my participant makes regarding students’ abilities and capabilities and observe the consistencies of these stated beliefs over time as well as the ways in which these stated beliefs relate to and are consistent or inconsistent with her actions.

The findings of these studies of teacher beliefs in general education highlight the role of underlying beliefs in teachers’ actions and decision-making. In order to understand what teachers do in the classroom with students more fully, one must have an understanding of the beliefs that inform teachers’ interpretations of situations and help form the foundation for their behaviors. Additionally, most of these existing studies of connections between teacher beliefs and teaching practice utilized extensive qualitative data collection periods and a variety of data

sources, both of which the current study will incorporate.

Teacher Beliefs and Practice in Music Education

The previously cited studies pertaining to teacher beliefs and practice in general education provide evidence that teacher beliefs affect how they behave in the classroom and thus also affect the learning environment and experiences of students. It is a logical assumption, then, that music teachers' beliefs, including those about talent, have an impact on what they do in the classroom. Specifically, music teacher beliefs about talent likely affect the instructional decisions they make, the classroom environment they create, and, ultimately, the learning experiences of their students. While virtually no research exists pertaining specifically to this, several studies suggest ways in which the beliefs of elementary general music teachers underlie their broader thinking and actions in the classroom, specifically in terms of their beliefs about the purpose of the music program and about assessment/evaluation.

Teacher beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music. Several studies have revealed music teachers' beliefs about the purpose of their music programs and, subtly, the ways in which beliefs about purpose might relate to beliefs about musical ability. In order to examine the status of general music education in Ohio public schools at the time, Rasor (1988) surveyed 655 K-8 general music teachers regarding a variety of topics, including staffing, scheduling, curriculum, and philosophies/perceptions. In response to the question "What do you consider to be the primary purposes of general music education in our current society?" (p. 268), the most common beliefs expressed by teachers were to provide general knowledge (75%) and for enjoyment and gaining an appreciation of the art (49%). Only 20% said it should provide preparation for future music experiences, and only 15% said it should be for music literacy and creativity/self-expression goals. One might surmise that these beliefs about the purpose of music

education are related to beliefs about what students are capable of learning. However, Rasor did not examine the ways in which these philosophical beliefs relate to other beliefs or to classroom practice, as the current study will do.

Carter (1986) similarly studied the features of vocal/general music in Oklahoma elementary schools, surveying 461 teachers on aspects including teaching staff, scheduling, and facilities as well as gathering data on curricular content and goals of instruction. Participants were asked to choose three statements that most accurately reflected their teaching philosophies. The three most commonly-chosen philosophy statements were “to develop in all children a general love for and appreciation of good music,” “to develop skills of musical literacy so that students may participate in life-long musical experiences,” and “to create a learning environment that will not only develop the talents of the musically gifted but will develop aesthetic musical responsiveness in all students” (p. 76). These findings imply a connection between teachers’ beliefs about musical ability and beliefs about the purpose of their elementary music programs, which the current study aims to investigate further.

Teacher beliefs about assessment/evaluation in elementary general music. One purpose of assessment and evaluation is to measure and convey information about student ability. Therefore, there may be a relationship between teachers’ beliefs about students’ abilities and their beliefs about assessment/evaluation. A music teacher’s feelings about whether and how students should be assessed in elementary general music are likely influenced by his or her beliefs about who can be musical and develop musical skills. For example, a teacher who believes that only some of her students have musical talent may believe that it would be unfair to assess them all on the basis of their musical skills, while a teacher who believes all students can be musical may be more likely to feel that students should be assessed on their skills (which

every one of them has the potential to develop). Existing music education research suggests these possible connections between music teachers' beliefs about assessment/evaluation and their beliefs about their students' ability to learn music and develop musical skills.

One such study is that of Talley (2005). Talley surveyed elementary music teachers in Michigan, investigating the frequency, methods, objectives, and applications of assessment in their classrooms. When provided with the open-ended prompt "For what purpose(s) do you assess your students?" teachers most commonly said that they assessed to adapt instruction (55%), to assign grades (45%), or to gauge understanding (39%). Additionally, 16% mentioned that they used assessment to identify and challenge "gifted students." One participant wrote, "I do not believe in formal assessment in music. The only assessment is whether the students try the given task. It has been my experience that formal assessment makes music just another subject to learn and not enjoy" (p. 61). This statement subtly implies a belief that expecting all students to learn music would prohibit them from enjoying music. This may be due to an underlying belief that only some students can learn music and that asking other students to learn who are believed to be less capable would result in an unpleasant experience for those students. In contrast, the current study will explore the assessment practices of a teacher who believes every student can learn music and the classroom atmosphere this creates.

Music teacher beliefs reported in a study by Lane (2007) also suggest connections between assessment beliefs and practice. Lane surveyed 129 Canadian elementary music teachers to investigate their beliefs about and use of evaluation. Most of the teachers surveyed expressed the belief that music is an academic subject rather than an activity. However, when asked to rate the importance of various instructional areas, the teachers indicated that they believed that participation, singing, effort, and attitude were the most important. In addition, the

teachers indicated that they most frequently evaluated students on their participation, singing, effort, and attitude. The importance that these teachers ascribed to non-musical objectives seemed to be in direct conflict with their expressed belief that music is an academic subject rather than just an activity, suggesting that the environment or other beliefs are influencing these teachers' instructional and evaluation practices. These findings are relevant to the current study, because it aims to explore relationships between a teacher's actions and decision-making, including those related to assessment, and the ways in which this relates to her beliefs about students' musical abilities. Specifically, the current study will explore how the participant's beliefs that every student can develop musical skills relates to her beliefs about how and on what students should be assessed (e.g., musical skills or participation/effort).

Connections between beliefs about musical ability and beliefs about assessment were discovered by Niebur (1997) in a qualitative study of four elementary music teachers in Arizona, the purpose of which was to ascertain teacher beliefs about the National Standards in Music Education and whether "student achievement in elementary general music class can, and possibly should, be formally evaluated" (p. 43). The data collection process lasted an entire year and included ethnographic techniques including classroom observations, interviews, collection of artifacts, and periodic group meetings. Niebur analyzed and used the data to construct a literary story for each participant as well as to discuss trends across the participants.

As a whole, the participants expressed concerns about assessment, particularly the "sorting and ranking role of tests" (Niebur, 1997, p. 219). One participant commented, "I would be so upset if a child maybe was not musically talented and then said, Oh, I can't do music. I hate music" because of their poor assessment results (pp. 219-220). Her statement implies the belief in innate musical talent, while at the same time wanting all students to feel that they can

“do music,” which is an interesting contradiction. Another participant expressed the belief that assessing students changes the students’ attitudes toward music class:

It does change a lot of the way you think about *why* we’re there. It’s not just a place to relax for forty minutes. It’s a class. We’re going to learn something. It’s going to be a lot of fun, but you’re going to have to work at it. (p. 22)

The first participant also expressed skepticism about assessment because she valued creativity and aesthetic responses to music and questioned whether one could measure those things, suggesting that she views music instruction as an opportunity to develop students’ aesthetic responses to and appreciation of music. Niebur’s ability to thoroughly investigate and fully explore these beliefs was facilitated by her extended data collection period and use of multiple ethnographic techniques, which the current study will incorporate.

Shih (1997) also found connections between teacher beliefs about the uses of assessment in elementary music and beliefs about musical ability. Shih surveyed 59 fifth grade general music teachers in Texas to examine the relationships between their curricular objectives, instruction, and assessment practices and then purposefully sampled ten of those teachers to participate in interviews, the questions for which were developed to “confirm” survey responses and “help understand the meaning of the responses” (p. 76) by exploring participants’ reasons for emphasizing certain activities over others. When asked why they do or do not assess certain activities, the participants’ responses demonstrated a wide range of beliefs. One participant explained that she focused on singing “because I feel like everyone in my class can open up and sing” (p. 88), implying a belief that singing is a universal ability that anyone can develop. Another participant explained that she focused more on listening because “the kids will be consumers when they are adults” (p. 88), implying a belief that most will not be interested in

and/or capable of performing musical skills. In general, all of the interview participants believed that evaluating participation was as important or more important than evaluating musical skills; reasons given included “part of music is learning to appreciate it” (p. 134) and “it is difficult to grade based on students’ musical capabilities” (p. 148). However, Shih does not share whether the participants believed the difficulty lies in actually grading students’ abilities or in developing the capabilities of all students.

Although Salvador (2011), who was investigating the ways in which elementary music teachers used assessment to differentiate instruction, did not intend to focus on teacher beliefs, the overarching impact of teacher beliefs emerged as a theme for one of her participants. Salvador conducted a collective case study of three “exemplary” elementary music teachers in Michigan to explore the ways in they used assessment to differentiate instruction for their students. Salvador observed each teacher twice weekly over six or more weeks, and data sources consisted of field notes, videos of teaching, teacher journals, and multiple interviews with each participant, including verbal protocol analysis/think-aloud protocol. Findings indicate that the three teachers varied in their methods for assessing and the extent to which they individually assessed their students. They also used assessments to differentiate instruction for their students in different ways. Several of the participants’ comments implied beliefs about assessment held music teachers. For example, “Danielle” mentioned that her elementary music colleagues were resistant to assessing/evaluating the musical skills of their students “primarily out of fear that children would view themselves as unmusical if they did not receive top marks” (p. 84). “Carrie” verbally expressed beliefs about the importance of assessment, yet there was significant incongruence between her stated beliefs and her classroom actions, as Salvador observed no formal, individual assessment of students during her time in Carrie’s classroom.

For another participant, “Hailey,” teacher beliefs emerged as a powerful theme in Salvador’s (2011) analysis of her approaches to assessment and differentiation. Hailey repeatedly expressed the belief that “anyone can learn music, anyone can be good at music” (p. 227), stating:

Not looking at music as a talent, but as something that everyone can do, and everyone can succeed at... I think then enables me, or makes me want to track all of their individual progress, and to help them all achieve to the level [of their] potential. (p. 227)

Hailey also felt that conveying the belief that anyone can be musical to her students helped them understand, believe, and “know that everyone can [and should] achieve the things I am teaching” (p. 228). Hailey viewed it as her duty “as a public school music teacher to help each student learn music” (p. 231) and guide the sequential music [skill development] of each student” (p. 231). Thus she “required students to participate in music and engaged in frequent assessment and differentiated instruction” (p. 231). This was in contrast to Carrie, who “felt that, since some students did not choose to be in her class and some did not care for music, she should not force participation or focus on sequential skill building” (pp. 273-274). These differences led Salvador to surmise, “Perhaps this disagreement regarding the nature and purpose of elementary general music education was the root of differences in instructional style and thus the practice of assessment and differentiation” (p. 274).

Hailey’s views that all children can and should develop musical skills and thus all are expected to succeed musically in her class are similar to the “expectation to be musical” found by Koops (2010) among the Baatiikunda in The Gambia. In relating this finding to Western music education, Koops suggests:

The elementary general music program has an advantage in approaching the idea that all individuals are expected to be musical in that all students typically are enrolled in elementary general music. Operating with the assumption that all people are musical and have the capacity to make and enjoy music helps the teacher to persevere when a student struggles to find his or her singing voice, to search for new approaches to help a child with a disability play the recorder, and to celebrate the musical progress of all students. This sounds much like the beliefs of “Hailey,” who stated, “Not looking at music as a talent, but as something that everyone can do, and everyone can succeed at ... I think then enables me ... to help them all achieve” (Salvador, 2011, p. 227). However, because this was not the focus of Salvador’s study, she did not further investigate these beliefs or the ways in which they related to Hailey’s classroom practice or classroom culture. No such studies currently exist.

These existing studies of the ways in which music teachers’ beliefs about musical ability might underlie their broader thinking and action in the classroom are critical to the current study because they illuminate its methodological approach. Survey studies, such as those by Talley (2005) and Lane (2007), may be unable to continually investigate teacher beliefs as they emerge, instead offering only a limited understanding of teachers’ beliefs. In addition, these studies were unable to gauge the ways in which teacher beliefs relate to what teachers actually do in the classroom (which may be vastly different from what they *say* they do). On the other hand, qualitative studies, such as those of Niebur (1997) and Salvador (2011), may be able to investigate more richly and accurately the connections between teachers’ stated beliefs, inferred beliefs (as observed by the researcher), and actions in the classroom due to the extensive use of observation, open-ended interviews, and various other data sources, which the current study also will utilize.

Summary of Related Research

Much research exists on beliefs about musical talent held by the general population, in non-Western as well as Western cultures (Asmus, 1986; Blacking, 1967, 1971, 1973, 1987; Davis, 1994; Hallam & Prince, 2003; Hallam & Shaw, 2002; Koops, 2010; Mapana, 2011; Randles, 2011; Russell, 1997; Shouldice, 2013). Studies also have shown the positive and negative effects of these beliefs on people's musical engagement and musical self-esteem (Abril, 2007; Burnard, 2003; Koops, 2010; Mapana, 2011; Ruddock, 2012; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Russell, 1997; Whidden, 2008, 2010). Additionally, researchers have found that many music teachers also hold a belief in bi-modal inborn musical talent (Biasutti, 2010; Brändström, 1999; Clelland, 2006; Evans et al., 2000; Hewitt, 2006; Legette, 2002, 2012; Shouldice, 2009, 2012; Thompson, 2000). These studies, however, did not examine teacher beliefs about musical ability as they relate to what teachers actually do in the classroom with students.

In the field of general education, there is extensive research on the topic of teacher beliefs and the ways in which beliefs are connected to teaching practice (Anning, 1988; Beswick, 2005; Brickhouse, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Van Zoest et al., 1994; Zohar et al., 2001). While it appears that music teacher beliefs, specifically about musical ability, likely underlie teachers' general thinking and behavior in the classroom (Carter, 1986; Lane, 2007; Niebur, 1997; Rasor, 1988; Salvador, 2011; Shih, 1997; Talley, 2005), there are few studies that directly pertain to the ways in which music teacher beliefs about musical ability relate to teaching practice. Specifically, there are no studies in the music education literature that focus on music teachers who do not hold talent beliefs and the ramifications of the absence of such beliefs. More research is needed concerning music teachers who hold an "expectation to be musical" (Koops, 2010) for all children and the ways in which this belief relates to teaching practices and the classroom culture

these teachers create for their students, examining how teachers' beliefs about students' musical ability "[underpin] expectations and [have] a subconscious effect on how [teachers] behave" and thus convey their beliefs to students (Clelland, 2006, p. 39).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to explore one elementary music teacher's beliefs about the nature of musical ability and the ways in which these beliefs relate to actions and lived experiences in the classroom. Many researchers who have studied beliefs have done so through quantitative means. However, quantitative tools may be "too constraining" for the questions of this particular study because they "are derived from the scholarly literature and are predetermined by the researcher" (Richardson, 1996, p. 107). As a result, surveys and other quantitative data collection tools may not accurately capture the complexity and true nature of participants' beliefs.

Beliefs also can be difficult to articulate. "Individuals are often unable or unwilling, for many reasons, to accurately represent their beliefs. For this reason, beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do" (Pajares, 1992, p. 314). Thus, the current study of one music teacher's beliefs implemented a qualitative methodology, which not only facilitated connections between stated and inferred/observed beliefs but also allowed a deeper, richer investigation of beliefs. Examining this in an open-ended, informal manner enabled a thorough exploration of the various facets of the participant's beliefs as they emerged throughout the study. Additionally, a qualitative approach provided an understanding of the participant's beliefs and actions that allowed for the consideration of her lived experiences and the inner meanings she constructs as a result of those experiences and beliefs.

Design

This investigation used a case study design. Case study research involves "(a) the in-depth study of (b) one or more instances of a phenomenon (c) in real-life context that (d) reflects

the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 447). Because the current study aimed to illuminate the nature of one music teacher’s beliefs about musical ability and the ways in which these beliefs relate to lived experiences in the classroom, a case study design was most appropriate due to its ability to enable in-depth study of the phenomenon in real-life context that reflected the teacher’s perspectives.

Data were collected using ethnographic techniques and involved multiple data sources. These included extensive classroom observations documented through fieldnotes and video footage, audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, teacher journal entries, teaching artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, assessment tools), and researcher memos. I analyzed the data for emergent themes.

Participant Selection

I purposefully selected Deena Ridge (pseudonym) using intensity sampling. “An intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely,” and, when using intensity sampling, “one seeks excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 234). Patton advises that researchers who wish to use intensity sampling “must do some exploratory work” to determine the appropriate case(s) for study.

I identified Deena as an ideal case for intensity sampling. Through my experiences in music education workshops, conferences, and coursework in Michigan, I had gotten to know Deena over the previous 10 years. While I was beginning to design the current study, I happened to observe two of Deena’s elementary music classes for an unrelated project. (I wanted to observe various teachers engaging elementary music students in composition, which Deena frequently does.) During that observation I was amazed by what I saw. In the span of those two

classes, I saw her allow and enable all of her students to make music independently, respect and honor the various ways in which her students are musical, and convey an implicit message to students that every one of them has musical ability. I also had the opportunity to hear the results of students being provided with this environment over several years: In one third-grade class, almost every student was able to use singing voice accurately. Most elementary music teachers I know would be amazed by (a) the singing ability of the class as a whole and (b) the teacher's ability to not only get her students singing, but to get them singing *alone* and to actually *enjoy it*! Additionally, I heard her make several remarks to the class that conveyed her beliefs. For example, when questioned by one boy about the "points" that were earned in the singing game in which the students were singing in solo, she explained, "That's if everybody uses their light singing voice, and we had a couple that weren't quite there yet," implying that they would all get there eventually because there is an expectation that all can and will be musical. This teacher exemplifies exactly the characteristics I was seeking for the study, and when I approached her about the possibility of participating, she happily agreed.

The Participant

Deena Ridge is the music teacher at Thoroughgood Elementary School (pseudonym), which services over 400 students in preschool through grade 5. Thoroughgood Elementary is located in Forestview (pseudonym), a large city in southeastern Michigan with a population of approximately 114,000 according to the 2010 U.S. census. In part due to its proximity to a large university, the Forestview school district services a diverse student body, with over 60 languages spoken among the students in the district.

At the time of this study, Deena was in her tenth year of teaching music, all of which had been at Thoroughgood Elementary as well as four in which she taught part-time at a second

elementary school in the Forestview district. After originally spending 2 years as a piano pedagogy major at a large university in central Michigan, Deena began to consider elementary music teaching as a possible career option. She explains:

I always loved elementary music class in elementary school, and I always knew that I wanted to be a music teacher. Not necessarily what kind of music—or just a teacher, but I always did well at music. And so I think just the experiences that I had growing up, that I enjoyed them and I was good at it, and then I wanted to show others that they could learn it, too. (interview, October 30, 2012)

After assisting in an early childhood music class and taking an elementary general music methods course, Deena decided to do her student teaching placement in an elementary music classroom, where her desire to teach music to young children was solidified. This was due in large part to realizing what was possible for young children to know and do musically. Deena found fulfillment in teaching elementary music as a result of

Just seeing how much the students could learn. . . . and just knowing that I was the one who taught them what it was that they were able to do. And just how fast they pick it all up I think was really powerful. Because I wanted them to learn a love for music, but they were learning so much information and being able to do so much more than I was doing when I was in elementary school. (interview, December 4, 2012)

When I asked Deena her favorite thing about teaching elementary music, she responded, “When I see that look in the child’s face where all of a sudden they get it. Or they’ll give me an answer or a response that I didn’t think they’d be able to get” (interview, October 30, 2012). Similarly, her music program webpage on the Thoroughgood Elementary website declares:

I love teaching music to Thoroughgood students, and watching their musicianship grow and develop. It is wonderful to be able to see the same students year after year, knowing where they were in Preschool or Kindergarten, and seeing how far they've come when they leave Thoroughgood in 5th grade. (webpage, retrieved December 18, 2012)

Procedures

Following successful defense of the proposal for this study, I obtained university human subjects approval. In addition to obtaining Deena's consent to participate in the study (see Appendix B for participant consent form), I also gained administrator permission to conduct research at Thoroughgood Elementary. I began data collection in late October 2012 and collected data through January 2013, with one additional follow-up visit in March.

Observations of Deena's teaching occurred twice weekly throughout the majority of the data collection period. Each observation lasted for one entire school day, during which Deena taught eight different classes. In order to establish continuity, these observations took place on the same two days each week (Tuesday and Thursday, which were chosen based on Deena's schedule as well as my own), with the exception of one make-up visit (which took place on a Wednesday). I observed the same three fifth-grade classes and the same second-grade class on both Tuesday and Thursday mornings. On Tuesday afternoons I observed two kindergarten classes, one fourth-grade class, and one second-grade class. On Thursday afternoons I observed one second-grade class, one first-grade class, and two kindergarten classes. This meant that, between the two observation days, I ended up seeing every one of Deena's classes at the kindergarten, second grade, and fifth grade levels. I also observed an additional nine of Deena's classes on my Wednesday make-up visit, which included preschool, kindergarten, first grade,

third grade, and fourth grade. All classes were 30 minutes in length with the exception of second grade, which were 45 minutes.

In addition to my time as a participant-observer in Deena's classroom, I used interviews to explore Deena's beliefs through her words. "Although several researchers advocate the determination of beliefs through observation alone, most researchers use interviews in combination with observations. [This is because] the goal of these studies is ... to understand the nature of teachers' thinking and world view" (Richardson, 1996, p. 107). Thus, semi-structured interviews and/or informal discussion with the participant took place on a regular basis throughout the observation period, using what I saw in the observations to generate interview questions.

Data Collection

Because beliefs must be inferred from what participants say, intend, and do, data consisted of multiple forms. These included classroom observations, video recordings of those observations, written fieldnotes, audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with Deena, informal discussion/conversation, reflective journal entries, my researcher memos, and various artifacts gathered from Deena. The use of multiple data forms provided a richer data set that allowed me to "take into account the ways that individuals give evidence of belief: belief statements, intentionality to behave in a predisposed manner, and behavior related to the belief in question" (Pajares, 1992, p. 315). Using multiple data sources also enhanced the trustworthiness of the study, because I was able to triangulate data sources.

During and in reaction to observations, I gathered data in several ways. First, I recorded informal "jottings" throughout each day of observation, which I later developed into more extensive fieldnotes. These jottings also included pertinent notes from informal conversations

that took place with Deena but were not audio- or video-recorded. Second, I wrote analytical memos in which I recorded my thoughts (e.g., reactions, feelings, instincts, “hunches”). Third, I recorded video footage during most of my classroom observations so that I could go back and review particular events if necessary in order to enhance the accuracy of my fieldnotes.

The nature of my role as a participant-observer in Deena’s classroom varied throughout the data collection period. According to Patton (2002), “the extent of [the researcher’s] participation is a continuum that varies from complete immersion in the setting as full participant to complete separation from the setting as spectator” (p. 265), and I experienced this full continuum in Deena’s classroom. During my initial visit, I acted more as a participant, sitting on the floor with the students and interacting with them in order to help them become comfortable with having me in their classroom. Later in the data collection period, there were many times in which I acted almost entirely as an observer, sitting in a chair in a corner of the room so that I could watch and listen closely and take detailed notes on what I saw and heard. Often I balanced my observer and participant roles, sitting with the students on the floor and participating in the activities but taking my small notepad with me so that I could still jot notes. At other times I acted more as a participant than an observer, which was typically in response to student behavior. Deena had several kindergarten classes that were especially difficult to engage and keep focused and on task. During several of these classes I tried to help Deena with classroom management, sitting next to particular students who needed extra encouragement, redirection, or simply the immediate presence of an adult to help keep them on track. On one occasion I acted as a full participant, teaching the class for several minutes while Deena took a student to see the principal. This student had been so disruptive and out of control that Deena could not continue

with her instruction, so I jumped in and continued teaching the activity that she had begun (which I had seen her teach in a previous class) while she walked to the office with him.

During the data collection period, I conducted numerous semi-structured interviews with Deena. These interviews took place at times and locations that were convenient for her, most often in her classroom during her lunch break. The first interview took place on the first day of the observation period in order to explore beliefs that might lend insight to what I would see in the classroom. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled me to explore a set of questions while still allowing flexibility to ask follow-up or additional questions as they arose from Deena's responses. A preliminary list of questions is included as Appendix B. Because it was impossible to predict exactly what I would observe and what Deena would say, additional questions and topics for discussion emerged as the interviews progressed. I recorded each interview using Audacity and a digital mini-recorder and transcribed the interviews from the recordings.

In addition to traditional questions and probes, I used a variety of techniques during the interviews, such as showing video footage recorded during the observations to engage Deena in "think-alouds," so that I could explore her beliefs about students' musical abilities further. One of these was modeled on a technique used by Anning (1988), for which I showed Deena video footage of a particularly high- or low-achieving student and asked her to talk about that student and his or her musical ability. During our final interview in January and our follow-up interview in March, I read Deena passages from several sources on perceptions of musical talent and the effects of those perceptions (Burnard, 2003; Demorest & Morrison, 2000; Koops, 2010; Ruddock & Leong, 2005) and asked her to respond to them.

Additionally, I asked Deena to record her thoughts periodically in a reflective journal throughout the data collection period. This was done via email so that it was convenient for her. Each of the four reflective journal entries involved a set of questions to which I asked Deena to respond (see Appendix C) and also included an open invitation for her to reflect on what she felt was pertinent regarding students' musical abilities.

Finally, I collected various artifacts or forms of documentation that were relevant to the study. These included content from Deena's classroom website, her written correspondence to the parents of her students, existing video footage of performances/informances at Thoroughgood Elementary, a short video of students that Deena had filmed and text-messaged to me on a day I was not observing, and an article that she had written about composition in the elementary music classroom. While I did not obtain copies, I did examine several other artifacts including lesson plans and assessment tools.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis occurred throughout, as well as after, the data collection period, which allowed "the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (Creswell, 2007, p. 150). I coded each written data source (e.g., interview transcripts, journals, fieldnotes) using HyperRESEARCH 3.0 software. I began doing so through open coding, in which I "[identified] any segment of data that *might* be useful" in answering my research questions (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). Open coding continued throughout the data collection process. (See Appendix D for codebook.)

After finishing data collection, I read through all data sources again and edited my codes, combining codes to reduce redundancy and creating new codes or subcodes to reduce bulk (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009). I then used axial coding to group codes that

“[seemed] to go together” (Merriam, 2009, p. 179). During both open and axial coding, I continued to write analytical memos, the purpose of which was “to document and reflect on: [my] coding process and code choices; how the process of inquiry [was] taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in [my] data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 32). From the groupings constructed during axial coding, I created four main categories that served as emergent themes, which Gall et al. (2007) define as “salient, characteristic features of a case” (p. 452). These four themes are presented in Chapters Four through Seven. Thick description will serve as a means for portraying the findings and participant as richly and as accurately as possible (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007).

Trustworthiness was enhanced in several ways. First, I participated in prolonged engagement in the field, observing entire school days eleven times over a period of roughly 2 months. This “repeated observation of the same phenomenon” over an extended period of time helps to “increase the validity of the findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). The second way I ensured trustworthiness is through the collection of multiple sources of data. This allowed for data triangulation, showing that findings are “supported by more than a single source of evidence” (Yin, 2009, p. 116). Third, I conducted member checks by having Deena read and give feedback on raw data sources, as well as my analysis and interpretations, to see if she felt they were accurate, fair, complete, and representative (Creswell, 2008). Finally, two colleagues with experience in qualitative research in music education provided peer review of codes and emergent themes.

Researcher Lens

Earlier in the review of related research, I cited a study by Salvador (2011) in which she describes how the actions of one teacher, “Hailey Stevens,” stemmed from her philosophical

beliefs about music learning and teaching. After reading the description of Hailey, one might suggest that I include “Hailey” as a participant in this study. However, that would be ill-advised because I am “Hailey.” In this study, rather than serving as a participant, I was now the researcher, investigating beliefs much like those I hold myself, and it is these beliefs that acted as the “filter” or “lens” through which I viewed the current study. Some might argue that this makes me biased, unable to objectively examine the phenomenon at hand. However, an underlying assumption of qualitative research is that there is no true objectivity, no universal truth. As a qualitative researcher, I recognized that I, as the “primary” or “key” research instrument (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2002), and my beliefs and experiences as an elementary music teacher allowed me unique insight on the topic at hand.

Understanding the personal perspective of the researcher is crucial, particularly in studies of an ethnographic nature. Margaret Mead stressed the importance of her personal perspective as an ethnographer, clearly identifying her positionality so that readers could understand her “version” of the truth: “This book is being written from the standpoint of a woman of middle age, of an American, and of an anthropologist” (in Lutkehaus, 1995, p. 192). Like Margaret Mead, I also must identify my own positionality: I am a music teacher who believes that all children can be musical. This is why I made the choice to teach elementary general music: to empower each and every child in my classroom to develop his or her musical potential to the fullest extent possible so that by interacting with and making music, all of my students can lead richer, fuller lives.

Whether or not Deena shares these same beliefs, my 10 years of experience as an elementary music teacher allowed me to bring unique meaning to what I saw and heard in my fieldwork with Deena and her students. Additionally, my 5 years of experience as an instructor

and presenter of professional development/in-service sessions, workshops, and conference sessions, as well as my 3 years as a student-teacher supervisor, have allowed me to work with a large number of music teachers and thus helped to inform my perspective in Deena's classroom and the understanding I constructed during my time there. Furthermore, I am a friend and colleague of Deena; having met her more than 10 years ago, I have gotten to know her well in both professional and social settings. My own substantial teaching experience and personal beliefs, along with the relationships I have developed with Deena and her students, have allowed me to interpret and find insight in the field. Like many ethnographers, I honored my own "experiential knowledge" of the field in which I will conducted this research (Finn, 1995) while making every attempt to honor and accurately portray the beliefs and actions of my participant.

Limitations

As mentioned above, my interpretations of the data inevitably were influenced by my own experience and beliefs. Even the data collection itself was shaped by my own beliefs, because I observed the events in Deena's classroom through this filter. Additionally, my beliefs played a part in guiding my conversation with Deena, as they caused my to ask certain questions and not others.

Because this is a qualitative study of only one teacher, the findings are not generalizable. However, these findings may be transferable to other teachers with the same beliefs in similar settings. An additional limitation is that I cannot infer any direct causal links between Deena's beliefs and her actions in the classroom, nor between beliefs, actions, and classroom environment. There are a multitude of factors that undoubtedly come into play, including other beliefs and influences outside the music classroom. However, the use of prolonged engagement in the field, multiple data sources, member checks, and peer review help increase the likelihood

that the data, analysis, and interpretation accurately represent the nature of Deena's beliefs, actions, and classroom culture.

CHAPTER 4: “EVERYBODY HAS SOMETHING”: BELIEFS ABOUT MUSICAL ABILITY

In this chapter I will explore Deena’s beliefs about musical ability. This first theme centers around Deena’s core belief that music is something everyone can do and that each of her students has musical potential and can develop musical skills and understanding. While she acknowledges that students have varying levels of musical ability and that some may learn music more quickly and/or easily than others, Deena believes that musical ability is a product of one’s previous experience, practice, effort, and confidence/self-esteem and that all students can learn and improve their musical skills over time. Deena also believes that there are different ways of being musical and that all students have different musical strengths. This chapter will focus on each of these aspects of Deena’s beliefs about musical ability.

All Students Are Musical

Deena holds the belief that all human beings have musical potential and can learn to make music. In describing the way she conceptualizes musical ability, Deena explains, “I feel like everybody has something to offer” (interview, October 30, 2012); all students have musical potential that can be nurtured and cultivated. According to Deena, “All of my students are musical” (interview, March 28, 2013). Because she believes that all students are musical, Deena believes that each of her students can achieve in her music classroom: “I feel that all students can succeed in making music” (email journal, January 31, 2013).

Although Deena believes that all students have the potential to succeed musically, she notes that they do not all develop their musical abilities at the same pace. “I feel like they all have some form of musical talent or musical abilities. It’s just sometimes with some it takes longer for them to get there” (interview, October 30, 2012). While students may not develop

musical skills at the same rate, Deena explains, “they can all eventually get to some form of success” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Deena often compares musical ability to achievement in other subject areas. Just as we expect all students to learn and develop skills in spelling or mathematics, Deena expects all students to develop some level of musical competence in her classroom:

They all have something [musical potential], and it just takes practice, like with anything. Like with math, they don't all just come to school knowing how to do math. They have to practice, and they have to get taught. So I feel like it's sort of the same here [in music] where if I teach it, they'll all ... be able to be successful. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Musical Ability vs. Musical Potential

Deena defines musical ability as “what a child is able to do musically” (interview, March 28, 2013). However, she acknowledges that what a child is able to do musically at a certain point in time is just that: achievement at a certain point in time. Deena sees musical ability as malleable,

because there are some students who come in being able to do almost nothing, and like if we're playing instruments, they can't keep a beat, they can't stay within the tempo. But with practice, they can get there, and there could be so many reasons with that. Like maybe their gross motor skills, fine motor skills aren't developed, or they just haven't experienced it yet. And so they need practice to be able to do it. And then I feel like mostly they're successful, so they can get there. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Rather than seeing musical ability as static and fixed, Deena believes, “Musical ability can get better with practice. I think that each student can improve their music ability as long as they're working at it” (interview, March 28, 2013).

Deena distinguishes a student's musical ability from his or her musical potential. While musical ability is what one "is able to do" presently, Deena believes he or she likely has the potential to achieve much more in the future. "I feel like my students ALL have a *lot* of music potential. And some of them are going to tap into that more than others. But I think, yeah, everybody has a huge amount of music potential" (interview, March 28, 2013).

Influences on Musical Ability

According to Deena's beliefs, there are a number of things that influence the extent to which a person can "tap into" his or her musical potential. When describing the kinds of things to which she attributes the difference between a successful student and a struggling student, Deena said, "I think there's a *lot* of factors that contribute to it" (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena believes that one's musical ability is the result of his or her prior musical experiences, practice, time, effort, and self-confidence.

Prior Musical Experiences

According to Deena, one of the most powerful influences on a student's musical success is his or her prior experience with music. Deena believes that in order to be musically successful, one must have a foundation of musical experiences upon which to build. When asked what kinds of things she believes are the most important determinants of a student's musical success, Deena immediately answered, "I think if they have a good... like a good... what's the word... not background, but like if they have a foundation, a good foundation" (interview, January 8, 2013).

Deena observes that some students come to school already having a strong foundation of musical experiences. When asked to describe what distinguishes a musically strong student, Deena declared, "Sometimes it's things that they've had outside the school, experiences that

they've had with music [outside of school]" (interview, October 30, 2012). This existing foundation of musical experiences enables those students to succeed more readily in her music class. Deena explains,

I think for some of them they've had music growing up. Maybe their parents have been singing with them or they are musicians. They take them to cultural events like concerts, and the child has been exposed to that ahead of time, before they come into the music room. Maybe they take lessons on something. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Deena describes one of her strongest students, a fifth-grade girl named Emily (pseudonym):

I think that she comes from a very musical family, that they take her to different musical events... She has a younger sister, Caty, in one of the second grade classes . . . and she's pretty musical, too. I think the parents have this expectation that their kids are learning piano, their kids are gonna practice. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Deena believes that these prior musical experiences help Emily and other students like her to be successful in the music classroom.

A lot of times I feel like that does help them when they come into the music room because they've had sort of like the pre-... They've had other musical experiences when they come. And then with others they come into the music room, and they've never had any of that. (interview, October 30, 2012)

While prior musical experiences can help students to succeed, Deena feels that a lack of these experiences can hinder students' musical achievement. Deena describes students that come to her with minimal previous experiences with music, saying, "It's like they're starting at zero" (interview, October 30, 2012). According to Deena,

Sometimes that is difficult when... you get a new student, and they haven't had any of those other experiences that those [other] kids have had. So then that student has to sort of, not start at zero, but they haven't had four years that the other students have” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Deena described one such student, a second-grade girl:

Becki came [to Thoroughgood Elementary School] mid-year [during] first grade, so she hasn't gotten as much [musical experiences/instruction] as the other kids. And she's also a little bit shier. And she's not quite in her singing voice. I think she'll be able to get there eventually, but she hasn't had enough of it [musical experiences/instruction], I think, to be there [in singing voice] yet. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Because Deena believes that students' prior experiences with music form the foundation for their musical achievements and that students come to her with varying amounts of prior musical experiences, she does not expect them all to demonstrate the same level of musical ability in her classroom. When I read aloud a quote from an article that said, “Thus while intelligence can be nurtured, it is assumed that talent is either present or absent from birth” (Demorest & Morrison, 2000), Deena responded by saying, “If they haven't experienced it [music], then how are they going to be able to do it?” (interview, March 28, 2013). For this reason, Deena sees it as her responsibility to provide her students with a rich foundation of musical experiences. When I asked Deena what kinds of things she does to help her students be successful at music, she responded, “I think having them experience it [music], like be ‘bathed’ in it” in her classroom (interview, March 28, 2013). From the moments students walk through her classroom door, Deena tries to maximize the amount of music they experience in her class.

I want them to get as much as possible out of the experience here, and when I see them for such a short amount of time, I try to put as much into that 30 minutes or whatever as possible and start the musical experience when they're coming into the room so they're starting to be bathed in music from the second that they're in. Just so they can learn as much as possible before they leave me and continue on. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Deena believes that, by providing her students with as many rich musical experiences as possible, she will help build their musical abilities. Deena recalled a second-grade boy who had recently experienced new-found success in her class, saying, “[In addition to other factors], I also would like to think that the activities we have done leading up to this activity helped him by giving him the readiness to be able to be successful” (email journal, November 21, 2012).

According to Deena’s beliefs, the greater the musical experiences she helps her students to have, the more they will be able to tap into their musical potential and develop their musical abilities.

In describing three of her second-grade students, Deena says,

Rin and Preston have been my students since preschool, and I just feel like the two of them and Bryson, who was also a preschooler, that class--They just... They got it from when they were really little, and you can tell. I feel like I can... My preschoolers that are in this class always go above and beyond the rest of them, and it just comes really naturally to them now, where it didn't years ago. But at this point, I mean, some of them were in preschool for two years before they came to kindergarten, and so they just got a lot more music than the rest of the kids. (interview, January 8, 2012)

Deena believes that the rich, high-quality musical experiences that those students have received in her classroom from an early age, in addition to musical experiences they may have had outside

of school, have helped them develop their musical ability to a greater extent than might have been possible otherwise.

Practice and Progress over Time

In addition to a foundation of musical experiences, Deena believes that students need differing amounts of time and practice to succeed musically. Deena notes that some students seem to develop musical skills more quickly than others: “They're just able to do it easily” (interview, January 8, 2013). However, for other students “it doesn't come as easy to them. So it'll take some more practice” (interview, January 8, 2013).

For this reason Deena does not expect all students to achieve at a uniform level at any given point in time. She explains, “I believe that sometimes students are able to do something that I assess while others need more practice” (email journal, January 31, 2013). When I read Deena several quotes from adults who felt that being musical is something one “is or isn't” or that it takes a “naturally talented person to succeed” (Ruddock & Leong, 2005), she responded, “I don't think so. I think just like with anything it can take practice. If you're not able to do it at first, then if you practice, I think there's a possibility that you'll be able to do it” (interview, January 8, 2013).

Because Deena believes that students need varying amounts of time and practice in order to develop their musical abilities, she tries to tailor her instruction so that struggling students get ample practice with the skills they are learning. For those students for whom music “doesn't come as easy,” Deena says, “I just try to do a lot of repetitions” (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena also uses different strategies when trying to help students who are struggling with a particular task. For example, Deena explains that it might be that “they need a little bit of extra time with it or maybe they'll need a few more turns or maybe they just need to take a break and

watch other people do it” (interview, January 8, 2013). Deena described one second-grade student, Aiden, who was new to Thoroughgood Elementary this year: “He started out not really being able to match pitches, but he's... He got there really quickly. Like probably the first month he wasn't [singing accurately], and then after that now he's pretty accurate.” When I asked what helped Aiden make progress, Deena speculated, “Possibly just hearing what's going on in class, hearing the other kids match pitch, being able to practice on his own a lot [in class]” (interview, November 15, 2012).

One of Deena’s favorite things about teaching elementary music is seeing the progress that her students make over time. On her school webpage, she declares,

I love teaching music to Thoroughgood students, and watching their musicianship grow and develop. It is wonderful to be able to see the same students year after year, knowing where they were in Preschool or Kindergarten, and seeing how far they’ve come when they leave Thoroughgood in 5th grade. (webpage, retrieved December 18, 2012)

Deena told a story of one such student whom she had seen make tremendous progress over time:

I had one student who, he just left. He was in fifth grade last year. And from kindergarten through second grade, he just couldn't find his singing voice. It was always monotone or, like, contour. Like sort of inflection, but it was never really singing. And you know, I kept trying to get him to use his singing voice, and it wasn't coming, wasn't coming. And then finally one time in second grade, he sang! (interview, October 30, 2012)

Deena recalls, “That was really cool to see, because I do--I see the kids from... from since they're really young to fifth grade, and so sometimes I will see a lot of progress there” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Seeing her students over such an extended period of time allows Deena to introduce and reinforce musical skills and knowledge gradually. I noted this in one of my researcher memos: “She builds their skills and dispositions over time, starting in kindergarten, so that by fifth grade, they are competent singers/music-makers. Something about time being the key—giving students time to develop and succeed, gradually building” (memo, November 8, 2012). Deena noted something similar in one of her journal reflections: “They will eventually grow (for example with matching pitches) if I continue to teach them in music class from year to year. Most of my students by the time they leave me in 5th grade are able to match pitch and sing in a light singing voice” (email journal, January 31, 2013). This was verified during my observation in Deena’s classroom: While observing a game in which all students took turns singing in solo, I noted that all but four of the 66 fifth-grade students used their singing voices (fieldnotes, December 13, 2012). When I asked her about her students’ singing ability, Deena said,

Normally if I have them from the beginning, from kindergarten and first [grade], it's usually just... like three or four [students who still aren't singing by the end of fifth grade].... mostly if they've been coming to me since kindergarten or preschool, I feel like normally by second grade they're almost all there [in singing voice]. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Not only does Deena believe that students need varying amounts of time and practice to succeed, but she also conveys this belief to her students. She frequently reminds them that they need practice to improve and that some will need more practice than others. For example, Deena explains this to her students by comparing music to other subjects:

Sometimes someone is good at math, while other times it takes longer for someone else to do the math problems. Other times, such as recorder music, sometimes someone

spends a lot of time practicing so it becomes easy, while another person hasn't gotten there yet. (email journal, January 31, 2013)

By helping her students understand that everyone succeeds at different rates, Deena hopes to encourage them to keep trying to improve even when they do not feel successful.

Effort

Another factor that Deena believes is important in helping students develop their musical abilities is effort. She explains, "If you don't ever *try*, you're not going to be able to do it" (interview, January 8, 2013). Deena believes that the amount of effort a person puts forth has an impact on his or her level of success: "If they use more effort, then they can tap into it [their music potential] more" (interview, March 28, 2013). As long as students are putting forth effort, Deena believes that they will eventually be successful: "I think that each student can improve their music ability as long as they're working at it" (interview, March 28, 2013). "Some will succeed more than others, but as long as they are trying, they will improve in some way" (email journal, January 31, 2013).

Deena also tries to communicate the importance of effort to her students. One of the five rules in her classroom is "Participate to the best of your ability" (fieldnotes, October 30, 2012), and she frequently encourages the students, "Try your best!" (fieldnotes, November 15, 2012). When students experience success, Deena reminds them that effort played a part. I observed an example of this in a program Deena uses with her fourth-grade students called "Recorder Karate," in which students are rewarded with a "belt" for each song they are able to master playing on their recorders. I saw and heard many students "testing" for their recorder belts at the end of the school day, including Max, who had struggled with learning a particular song. I recorded the following in my fieldnotes while watching Max test for his "black belt": "After

handing him his black belt, Deena said, ‘Good, Max! You did it! You worked hard on those [belt test songs], didn’t you?’” (fieldnotes, December 13, 2012). This communicated to Max that his achievement was to be credited to his effort, rather than to an innate and/or fixed ability.

Deena also described one fourth-grade student who tried to figure out a difficult song on her own, realizing the importance of effort: “I had a girl come in one [from] of the classes that hasn’t had anybody do it [play the difficult song], and she says, ‘I kept working on it, and I kept working on it, and yesterday I finally played it!’” (interview, March 28, 2013). This particular student has come to realize the role that effort plays in musical achievement, a realization Deena hopes all of her students will make.

Confidence and Self-esteem

In addition to prior experiences, time, practice, and effort, Deena also believes that her students need to feel confident that they can and will succeed musically. In describing what she believes to be the determinants of musical success, Deena explained, “I think that [having a foundation] helps them to be more enthusiastic about it [music]. I think it makes them feel more confident, and I think--yeah, when they’re confident about it, they’re more likely to succeed” (interview, January 8, 2013). If students have high musical self-esteem and confidence, then they will be more likely to persevere and keep trying when they do not succeed right away.

Deena explains,

I think it just takes some time [for some students to be successful], but as long as they don’t feel like if they can’t do it, they’re not a... like, it’s not a failure, then they’re just going to keep trying until they’re able to do it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Deena believes that helping her students develop identities as musicians is the key to their musical confidence and self-esteem. According to Deena, helping students see themselves as musicians

helps with [their] confidence level. When they *feel* like they're musicians, then all of a sudden the sky's the limit, and then they'll try everything. And then they'll try to do more than maybe they're able to do [currently], but it doesn't phase them. It's OK if they make a mistake. They'll just keep trying until they're able to get it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Differences in Musical Ability

Due to the interaction of these factors and their impact on student achievement, Deena acknowledges that students have differing musical abilities. “Just like with any subject, the students are not on the same level” (email journal, January 31, 2013). Even if all students came to her music classroom with the same prior experiences, Deena speculates, “I think that there still would be a range of abilities . . . some kids it just clicks with them right away, and other kids it takes a while before it does” (interview, October 30, 2012).

While Deena believes that all of her students are musical, she does not deny that musical ability varies from student to student. She even goes so far as to say that there are students who seem to have “natural ability” in music: “I think some kids have that natural ability, where it just works with them. They come in, they understand it [music]. They can just do it” (interview, October 30, 2012). Based on her experience with students, Deena notes, “Some can do it [music] naturally, while others continue to try and try” (email journal, January 31, 2013).

While Deena does acknowledge that some students seem to have a “natural ability” for music, she does not see this as a prerequisite for developing musical skill. Rather, she views it as

a matter of the speed and ease with which students will develop their skills. For example, she describes one such fourth-grade student:

Throughout music class, like, he just gets it. Like he'll be the first one to figure out how the melody goes in a song. He'll be the first one to, like, he'll take a xylophone part that we've learned in class, and then the next day he'll come back and say, 'Oh, I learned how to play this on piano.' (interview, October 30, 2012)

In describing the differences between her students, Deena explains,

For some of them, like let's say with a xylophone part, it might be a really challenging xylophone part, and some of them just... they can hear it, they can figure it out, they can do it, their motor skills work. Like they're just able to do it easily, and it just moves smoothly. And then with others they can hear it, but it doesn't come as easy to them. So it'll take some more practice.” (interview, January 8, 2013)

While those students who seem to have a “natural ability” may succeed at a musical task quickly and easily, students who struggle simply need more time and practice to succeed at the same musical task.

Not only does Deena acknowledge differences in musical ability among her students, she even goes so far as to say that “some [students] are more musical than others” (interview, January 8, 2013). Deena describes one second-grade boy as particularly musical, saying, “I really want to figure out a way to tap into his musicianship because he's so musical! He can figure out chord roots, he can figure out harmony parts. He just understands music without even trying to” (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena talks about one fourth-grade girl much differently, explaining that she “doesn’t realize that she just isn’t doing it correctly at all.... She just isn’t that musical” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Although she seems to see this student as less musical than other students, Deena's language—"She just isn't *that* [emphasis added] musical"—still seems to convey that she believes this student has musical potential. In talking more about this student, Deena revealed, "I think there are other issues going on. Like just more like mental issues within... like the connections in other subjects, as well, just not being made" (interview, October 30, 2012). When I asked Deena about these issues and what this student's achievement might be like if these issues were not present, she answered,

You know, I think it might be different... because the amount of effort she puts in it is a lot, and so I feel like if she didn't have some of those other things in her way that she would be able to be more successful. (interview, March 28, 2013)

While Deena acknowledges differing abilities among her students, she still believes that all of them can develop some level of musical skill:

I think that all of them can have that love for music and can participate in music to the best of their ability. Some are going to do more and some are going to do less, but I think they can all still do *something*. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Despite having students with different musical backgrounds and different levels of ease and speed with which they develop musically, Deena believes that all students have musical potential that can be cultivated in order to enable all students to participate in making music.

All Students Can Improve

Although Deena knows that students come to her with different experiences and differing levels of ability, she expects that each and every one of her students will improve their musical abilities in her classroom.

I do expect them to [all be musical]. And some are more musical than others, but I expect that they'll try and that they will improve. They may not be the most musical student ever, but they'll do some improvements, and they will at some point be in a sense musical in some way. (interview, January 8, 2013)

By providing her students with rich musical experiences in her classroom, Deena believes that she can help all of her students reach some level of musical success. “Some definitely will come [to me] more able to do it than others. But with the experiences, they can become more talented than before” (interview, March 28, 2013).

Rather than seeing musical ability or talent as a static and fixed property that exists in some students and not in others, Deena believes that musical ability is malleable and can be cultivated in all students. Furthermore, Deena sees it as her responsibility as a music teacher to help every single student improve his or her musical abilities to the greatest extent possible. In talking about the previously mentioned student whom she described as “just [not] that musical,” Deena says,

I want to see that all of these years of me teaching her have made some form of an impact, and I feel like I *should* be able to get her to improve, a little bit at least. I mean, she may not improve as much as another student in her same grade will, but I feel like if she's here and she's experiencing it; there has to be *some* form of improvement before the year's over. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Through the music learning experiences that Deena provides, she believes that all students—regardless of the ability level with which they come in—will progress in developing their musical skills and understanding.

I feel like when they come into my room, maybe some [students] are more talented than others, but then if we're working on something, maybe a student didn't participate in music before they came into my room or they didn't participate in the way that they're doing it once they're here. And then all of a sudden they're possessing that musical talent that they may not have had before. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Many Ways to Be Musical

In addition to acknowledging differing levels of musical ability among her students, Deena also believes that there are different ways in which people can be musical.

I think that all of my students are musical in some form. I think if you're able to do it correctly—And there's so many... It's so broad, what 'correctly' means. Like, if they can keep a steady beat or if they can sing with phrasing or if they're able to play an instrument part with the correct notes at the correct times. I think to be musical there're so many different things you can do. You can maybe be musical in the way that you compose or in the way that you improvise or the way that you sing. It just depends on the activity. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Because she believes a person can be musical in a variety of ways, Deena believes all of her students have different musical strengths. “With one student it may be their strength is singing, and they can always sing the right notes, and then maybe another kid can do really complicated things on the xylophones” (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena referred to her students' different musical strengths when discussing why she includes composition in her classroom:

Along the same lines as, like, each student is musical in different ways, I feel like there are some students that maybe struggle with being able to play xylophones or being able

to understand the rhythm patterns behind it, but when we get to composition, it's just something that they really enjoy doing and they're good at. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Since Deena believes there are different ways in which people can be musical and thus can have different strengths, Deena believes that each and every one of her students can experience some form of success in her classroom. “Because I'm [teaching and] assessing so many different things, there's always something that a student is good at or able to be successful in” (interview, January 8, 2013).

Summary

Deena believes that every one of her students has musical ability and thus the potential to develop musical skills and understanding; therefore, she expects that all students will develop some level of musical competence in her classroom. Deena defines musical ability as that which a person currently is able to do musically and believes that musical ability can develop over time. While she acknowledges that students have varying levels of musical ability and that some may learn music more quickly and/or easily than others, Deena believes that musical ability is a product of one's previous experience with music, practice, effort, and confidence/self-esteem and that all students can learn and improve their musical skills over time. Deena also believes that there are different ways of being musical and that students have different musical strengths.

CHAPTER 5: “THEY’RE ALL SO DIFFERENT!”: TREATING STUDENTS AS INDIVIDUALS

In this chapter I will explore the intersections between Deena’s beliefs about musical ability and the ways in which she views her students as unique individuals. Deena understands that they have unique backgrounds, experiences, abilities, strengths, and interests. For this reason, she believes that each student needs something different from her as the music teacher in order to help him or her continue to grow and progress in his or her musical development. By being sensitive to each student’s individual needs and not making assumptions that may limit his or her achievement, Deena tries to help each student reach his or her fullest musical potential.

Students as Individuals

Some have criticized music education as being too focused on students as a collective group rather than on students as individuals (Kratus, 2007; Williams, 2007, 2011). Kratus (2007) argues that, in many cases, “school music emphasizes large-group performance, in which everyone plays or sings the same piece at the same time” (p. 45). In this type of situation, teachers focus on their subject matter—what concepts they will teach and how they will teach them in a particular lesson—and then gauge the success of their lessons based on how the students performed as a group. In a study of the assessment practices of elementary music teachers in Texas, Shih (1997) found that the most commonly used method of assessing singing was “observing group performance” (p. 105). In direct contrast to this focus on group performance, Deena treats her students as individuals.

I began noticing this theme about halfway through my data collection. In one researcher memo, I noted, “A lot of elementary music teachers don’t even know all of their students’ names! Deena not only knows their names but also knows a lot about each student. Some music

teachers see and treat students as one large mass, but Deena sees, acknowledges, and values them as individuals” (memo, December 6, 2012). Several weeks later I noted something similar: “Deena doesn’t expect all students to do the same thing or BE the same. She recognizes that they all have different abilities, strengths, and interests” (memo, December 19, 2012). One specific comment from Deena really stuck with me: after one particular group of fifth grade students had left her classroom, she turned to me and exclaimed, “They’re all so different!” (fieldnotes, November 15, 2012).

Deena’s view of students as individuals comes across often in her words. For example, in discussing her belief that all students can succeed in music at different levels, she explains, “I try to treat each student individually, meet them where they are, and then see how far I can take them” (email journal, January 31, 2013). Deena frequently mentions that she wants to give each student individual attention. For example, she said in describing how each of them has a chance to be the “special helper” for the day, “It is another way that I can interact with each student, one on one” (email journal, December 17, 2012). She also explains, “I try to interact with all of my students individually. . . . Just to have that one-on-one connection with them I think helps [them all succeed]” (interview, January 8, 2013).

Deena’s focus on individual students and sensitivity to their unique needs and strengths is in contrast with the group focus of many traditional music classes, which some have characterized as typically having students do many things together as a group but rarely individually and not always considering students’ individual differences or needs (Kratus, 2007; Williams, 2011). “However,” I noted in a memo, “individual needs/differences seem to be Deena’s focus!” (memo, March 27, 2013). A colleague who served as a peer reviewer of my

data and analysis made a similar comment: “Rather than teaching music classes, she teaches music to students” (peer review feedback, May 1, 2013).

“Everybody is at Different Places”

Deena’s focus on individuals seems to be related to her acknowledgement that all students are at different places in their musical development. This is rooted in her belief that musical ability is dependent on prior musical experiences, practice over time, effort, and musical self-esteem. Because all of these factors vary from student to student, it would be unrealistic to expect all students to achieve at a uniform level at any given point in time. In describing her assessment practices, Deena explained, “I do not expect all students to achieve at the same level on my assessments. For example, some are able to always match pitch, while others struggle with matching a resting tone. Just like with any subject, the students are not on the same level” (email journal, January 31, 2013).

Deena also conveys this belief to her students, as in the following vignette from a fourth-grade class:

After the class played the middle section of ‘Ode to Joy’ on their recorders, Deena pointed out that this part ‘might take a little practice for some of us because it is tricky.’ Pete, a blond-haired Caucasian boy in a green shirt sitting near Deena’s desk, seemed to be getting angry and frustrated by this middle section. He looked across the circle and saw Jaedyn, the skinny African-American boy sitting near the door, and an Asian boy wearing a blue hooded-sweatshirt and plaid pants next to him celebrating that they had been able to play the song, which made him feel bad, because he shouted out in their direction, ‘For some people it’s easy, but for some people it’s hard!’

Next Deena put up notation for the three recorder parts to a song called 'Hot Marimba.' She led them in singing and fingering and then playing part one (which was easy), then part two (which was a little harder). Deena explained to the students, 'We'll do part one and part two together, and then we'll try part three.' Jaedyn exclaimed, 'Yes!' and started singing part three, which featured difficult leaps played at twice the speed of parts one and two. While he was waiting for part three to start, he began beat-boxing along to Deena's preparatory cue. After having the class try part three slowly and then inviting the students to try it up to tempo, Deena reassured them, 'Some of you will get it, some of you will not. Try your best!'

After this, the class began lining up at the door to leave, so I turned off the camera. Immediately after I went back to my chair to sit down, Pete had an outburst in line: 'If it's easy for some people, they shouldn't say!' He was visibly upset, clearly still feeling frustrated about not being able to play some of the more difficult recorder parts. Deena responded by matter-of-factly telling the class, 'Everybody is at different places... What's easy for some is not easy for others... If it's easy for you, don't make others feel bad... Later it will be much easier, but it will take a lot of practice.' (fieldnotes, November 13, 2012)

By communicating to the students that it is normal for them to be “at different places,” Deena “normalizes” the differences in students’ abilities.

This is something Deena explicitly addresses with her students. “We talk about the differences among all people. . . . We talk about how it sometimes will take someone longer to get it, but that’s okay” (email journal, November 28, 2012). Deena sees that her students do notice differences among their abilities, especially “as they get older and older,” but “normally

it's OK. Normally they just understand that not everybody is at the same place” (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena helps her students realize that they all have different strengths and weaknesses but that they can all be successful with any given task in some way at some point in time.

Success is Different for Each Student

Related to Deena’s belief that students are all in different places in terms of their development of musical ability is her belief that what qualifies as musical “success” is different from student to student. While Deena believes that all students can “get to some form of success,” she also believes that “they’ll be able to be successful on different levels” (interview, October 30, 2012). I noted in an analytic memo that Deena “seems to define ‘success’ as improvement that is specific to each child, as opposed to having a standard of achievement or ‘success’ that all are expected to obtain or that they must obtain in order to be considered ‘successful’” (memo, April 11, 2013).

Since Deena believes that success looks and sounds different for each child, her specific musical and educational goals vary from student to student. Deena’s “belief that all students have potential seems tied to the belief that they all have DIFFERENT potentials, which are influenced by a variety of factors;” “rather than helping all her students achieve a certain (same) goal, Deena seems to believe that her role is to help them all achieve SOME goal (at some level) that may be different for every single student” (memo, March 27, 2013). When describing her belief that all students can succeed in music, Deena explicitly stated that her goals for students vary: “For some [success] can even be a small goal such as learning to hold the mallets, playing B-A-G on the recorder, singing the resting tone, learning to keep a steady beat” (email journal, January 31, 2013).

Because success is different for each student, they all need something different from Deena in order to be successful. In describing how she helps struggling students, Deena explained, “With each individual I guess it's a little bit different” (interview, January 8, 2013). Some students might “need a little bit of extra time [to develop a particular skill] or maybe they’ll need a few more turns [to practice].” Other students who struggle with a task might need a boost in their self-esteem, to which Deena responds by “[trying to] make them feel better about it.” Others might lack sufficient prior experiences with music and “just need to take a break and watch other people do it” in order to gain an aural and/or visual concept of the task. Still others might need Deena “to make it easier for them” by altering the difficulty of the task so that they can be successful with it (interview, January 8, 2013). “Seeing each student as different and unique means that they all need different techniques, strategies, activities, instruction, and support to help them be successful” (memo, November 26, 2012).

Providing Opportunities for Success

Because Deena believes that each student can be musically successful in different ways and that each needs something different in order to help him or her reach success, she makes it a point to provide every student with opportunities to feel successful. One way in which Deena does this is by enabling and encouraging individual student growth through providing all students with differentiated learning experiences that are at varying levels of difficulty according to student needs. Another way Deena helps all students feel successful is by providing each of them with the opportunity to tap into their musical strengths and thus have “that part in the class where they can really shine” (interview, December 4, 2012). Both of these sub-themes exemplify Deena’s treatment of students as individuals.

Success for All: Different Difficulty Levels

As discussed in Chapter Four, Deena acknowledges differences in musical ability among her students, which she believes are in large part due to differences in their prior experiences, effort, self-esteem, and the speed and ease with which they learn. Some students catch on quickly when learning a musical task, while other students may require more time, practice, instruction, and/or remediation in order to master the same task. For this reason, Deena frequently differentiates instruction for her students by tailoring the task difficulty to meet students' learning needs. Deena explains:

Because I want to make sure that the kids get what they need. The kids that need the extra challenge, I want to be able to give it to them. Because otherwise they'll check out. And if they can do it and I'm limiting them, then they're not going to get to their full potential. . . . so sometimes my stuff is very challenging. . . . But then I still have other stuff for the students who aren't quite to that level. So then they don't feel frustrated that they can't do it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

By giving students “what they need” at various levels of difficulty, Deena is able to keep all students engaged and progressing in their musical development.

By adjusting the difficulty level of the musical tasks in which she engages her students, Deena is able to help each of them “get to some form of success” (interview, October 30, 2012). Rather than “teaching to the middle,” Deena incorporates a variety of degrees of difficulty within each class period so that the learning needs of average, higher-achieving, and lower-achieving students are met appropriately. Students who are strong can continue to be challenged by more difficult learning opportunities while students who are struggling can experience success with easier learning opportunities, resulting in musical growth for all students. I observed three ways

in which Deena helps all students achieve success through incorporating varying degrees of difficulty: 1) including multiple activities of varying difficulty levels within a single class period, 2) individualizing instruction within an activity by adapting content difficulty for each student, and 3) providing multiple parts of varying difficulty within an activity.

Activities of varying difficulty. When planning her lessons, Deena makes a conscious effort to include a variety of activities at various levels of difficulty so that each student can be appropriately challenged in order to learn and grow musically.

Every student is going to improve. And some are going to improve to a higher level than others. . . . And there're so many different things that they can do in class. Like they can do really challenging things, or they can do easier things. (interview, March 28, 2013)

By including a mix of challenging and more basic activities, Deena is able to help each student experience some level of accomplishment in every class period. She explains, “I try to make sure that I continue to challenge those students that need the challenges... But then I'll also throw in some activities that those students [who struggle more] can feel successful in” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Deena tries to pace her lessons accordingly, alternating back and forth between activities of greater and lesser difficulty. By doing so, she is able to minimize the level of boredom among the higher-achieving students and frustration among the lower-achieving students. In describing how she tailors her lessons, Deena says,

I want to be able to challenge that one student who is a little bit higher than the other ones, so that they don't get bored. . . . Usually once I do something that's really challenging, I take several steps back and do something that where those lower students can be successful, too, so that they don't get too frustrated. (interview, January 8, 2013)

In addition to planning her lessons to include activities at varying levels of difficulty, Deena also makes in-the-moment adjustments to her lessons based on what she observes in her students. For example, Deena says,

I'll be watching their faces throughout class. I'm always scanning the room to see if there's anybody that is *completely* overwhelmed with something, and then I'll try to do something for that student to make them feel like 'OK, maybe they didn't get this one, but they can still do *this*.' And there are a few kids like that, where they will shut down, but then if I quickly do something that they can do, then they're happy again. (interview, January 8, 2013)

By anticipating and responding to students' frustration or boredom with a task and reacting accordingly, Deena is able to maximize student engagement and learning so that each student is progressing in his or her musical development at an appropriate level.

Individualization of instruction within an activity. While Deena teaches all students the same general skills and content, she frequently differentiates her instruction within an activity in order to meet the individual needs of her students. Because students are all "at different places" in terms of their musical ability and skill development, she realizes that offering varying levels of difficulty within a particular activity will allow each of her students to be most appropriately challenged while all learning the same general skill or content. Deena explains,

I will take each student and try to help them get to where they will be challenged and will learn. I try to differentiate instruction to challenge my students that need a challenge, and help those students that are struggling still feel like they are succeeding. (email journal, March 28, 2013)

The most frequent way in which Deena differentiates instruction within an activity is by varying the difficulty level of the musical prompt given to each student. For example, Deena believes that helping all of her students develop their singing voices is particularly important and frequently engages them in echo-singing short tonal/melodic patterns. In this type of activity she might differentiate instruction by singing a tonal pattern for each student to echo but varying the difficulty of the pattern to meet the musical ability of each individual student.

For the kids who have already gotten it, I don't want to continue to do the same thing over and over again so they get bored, but then I can adjust how I do it. Like let's say with patterns, where I can give one student a complicated pattern to do if they need the challenge, but then I can take that step back and the students that aren't there yet can get a simpler pattern, and they can be successful with that simple pattern. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Deena bases this differentiation of instruction on her observations of students' prior musical achievement. If a student has shown that they have mastered a task with simpler content, she makes the content more difficult the next time that student practices that task or a similar one. If a student has struggled with a particular task, she remediates by making the content simpler and thus more attainable for the student, continuing the remediation until the student is successful.

Most of them are in their singing voice, and there're some that aren't. And so with the ones who are consistently getting the patterns correct, I try to give them more difficult patterns. The ones that aren't always consistent, I'll sometimes try to give them like the more tonic patterns to see if they're able to get those because those are more familiar with them. (interview, January 8, 2013)

One example of this individualization of instruction happened during a singing game I observed in a second-grade class (fieldnotes, March 28, 2013). In this game Deena would sing a short tonal pattern with solfege for each student to echo in solo, and the difficulty of these patterns varied from student to student (see Figure 1). For Mari, a girl who struggled with using her singing voice, Deena sang a simple descending tonic pattern. For Gordon, a boy who had consistently been using his singing voice to accurately echo tonic and dominant patterns, Deena sang a subdominant pattern comprised of leaps. After hearing Priya accurately echo a tonic pattern on her first turn, Deena later returned to her for a second turn in which she gave her a more difficult subdominant pattern.

Mari's Pattern:



Gordon's Pattern:



Priya's First Pattern:



Priya's Second Pattern:



Figure 1. Tonal pattern prompts of varying difficulty

Providing multiple parts. Another way in which Deena provides her students with varying degrees of difficulty in order to meet individual needs is through multiple parts within the same activity. I observed this most frequently with instrumental parts. For example, the “Hot Marimba” piece mentioned in the earlier vignette included three melodic ostinati of varying

difficulty (See Figure 2 for notation) for the students to play on their recorders. After having the students try each part, Deena then invited them to choose the part they would like to play, allowing each of them to choose the difficulty level that was most appropriate for them. Deena mentioned this when discussing how she deals with students who are struggling: “With recorder I’ll try to have, within one song sometimes, easier parts that they can do and harder parts for the other kids, too” (interview, October 30, 2012). By including these parts of varying difficulty, Deena is able to not only continue to push her higher-achieving students, but she also is able to help her lower-achieving students experience some form of success upon which they can build:

I’ll just alter the activity where I’ll have some parts that are really challenging and other parts that are not as challenging so those [struggling] students can get drawn to those parts--start with that. Once they’re successful with that, then they can increase what they’re able to do. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Balafon
from Hot Marimba! Walt Hampton

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Figure 2. Ostinati of varying difficulty

I wondered if the lower-achieving students might be embarrassed by having to play the easiest part, so I asked Deena if those students still felt successful playing the easy part. She replied,

I think as long as I go about teaching it in the right way. Like as long as they think and they know that all of the parts are needed. We *need* somebody to play the chord roots; we *need* somebody to play the harmony; we *need* somebody to play the melody; and if one of those parts isn't there, it's not going to sound as good. And so we need all of those parts in order for the song to sound good. I feel like when they understand that, then they're OK with playing a part that maybe isn't as challenging, and then they feel like they're succeeding because they're contributing something that's needed within that song. (interview, October 30, 2012)

In addition to communicating to her students that all parts are important, Deena also communicates to them that the differences in their abilities are normal and not a sign of anything negative. She explains,

I try to make them understand that it's OK if they can't do the challenging parts. That doesn't mean that they're not a good musician. It just means that maybe that's more challenging for them than [for] somebody else. But I also tell them to keep trying with those other [more challenging] parts. . . . until they're able to do it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

By communicating to her students that differences in ability are normal, she makes it acceptable for students to choose a part that is appropriate for them. Additionally, she conveys to her students that they have the power to increase their skill and develop the ability to play harder parts if they keep practicing.

Deena believes that giving her students a choice in what part they want to perform also helps them individualize their *own* learning. In addition to helping the students get more excited about the activity, offering them a choice of which part they will perform “can also help with differentiating instruction. . . . [because by] giving them a choice [of part], they can choose whether they are ready for a more challenging part, or if they need a part that is not as difficult” (email journal, November 10, 2012). By frequently offering her students a choice of difficulty, as well as normalizing differences in students’ musical abilities, Deena helps sensitize her students to their *own* educational needs and encourages them to seek out tasks that will appropriately meet those needs.

Success for All: Different Activities

As described in Chapter Four, Deena believes that there are different ways in which a person can be musical, thus each student has unique musical strengths. In describing the musical differences among students, Deena explains,

Some really enjoy composition and can really shine when we're composing. They just have all sorts of ideas. [For others], maybe they really enjoy xylophones, and they can do all these complicated things on the xylophones. And maybe somebody else has a really good musical memory and can pick up on tunes or the words that go along with it really fast. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Similarly, while “some students are able to match pitches exactly,” other students “are able to give the correct answers about pieces of music such as what the tonality is” (email journal, November 28, 2012).

Because students have unique musical strengths, Deena helps them all to be successful in her classroom by engaging them in a variety of musical activities in each lesson. Incorporating

an array of different musical activities enables all of the students to tap into their strengths by experiencing something at which they are good. Deena expressed this belief during our initial interview:

I try to do a combination of so many different types of music where students can figure out at least one thing that they're good at, whether it's instruments, whether it's composing, whether it's singing, whether it's improvising. I feel like there's always *something* that they're good at and that their strengths lie in. . . . I try to do a variety of different activities so I can make each of them feel successful.” (interview, October 30, 2012)

Deena reiterated this belief on numerous occasions, including in this email journal entry:

I try to make it [music class] varied enough that everyone will find something that they can be successful at. . . . With all the different types of musical activities we do, everyone can find something that they are successful at, whether it is singing, writing music, chanting, playing instruments, creating dances, etc. (email journal, November 28, 2012)

By including a variety of activities, Deena hopes that all students will be able to tap into their unique musical strengths and feel good about themselves.

Besides having different musical strengths, Deena also acknowledges that students have different musical interests. Thus, in addition to tapping into students’ musical strengths, incorporating a variety of musical activities into her lessons helps Deena also tap into students’ musical interests by allowing them to experience something they enjoy. “I try to teach music as a whole, including instruments, singing, dancing, composing, improvisation. This not only makes [the students] more well-rounded musicians, but also it helps me find something that everyone likes” (email journal, January 31, 2013). Deena says that when she plans her lessons,

I try to do a large variety of types of [musical activities] because some kids might love singing; another kid might love drums; another kid might love composing. And so I try to give them that complete music experience so that they can pick their favorites and what it is that they think they're good at. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Deena believes that allowing students to tap into their musical interests and engage in activities that they enjoy can increase their overall motivation and level of engagement in other musical activities.

That's why I try to do such a variety of music, of instruments, of singing, of composition, improvisation. Because when they are excited about something, that excitement tends to carry on, and then they're more willing to do the activities that maybe they don't appreciate as much or maybe they don't think that they're as good at. But then they're more willing to try, and they can improve upon those aspects of music, too. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Deena believes that student engagement (and thus student learning) is maximized when students are able to feel successful and perform tasks they enjoy. For this reason, she frequently allows students to choose their mode of music-making. She often offers students a choice of whether they will sing, play an instrument, or perform music in some other way, such as moving to the beat or doing a body percussion ostinato. In the following fieldnote excerpt, Deena offered fourth-grade students the option of choosing whether to play recorder or sing:

Deena reminded the students that they would be 'recorder caroling' on Friday—visiting other classrooms around the school during their music time to play some recorder songs for the other students—for which they would be reviewing some songs today. The students unpacked their recorders from their cases and reviewed playing "Winter

Wonderland,” followed by the harmony part to the song. After they had finished going over both parts, Deena told the class, ‘You have three choices. You can sing the whole time; you can play the melody; you can play the harmony; or you could do a combination of two or three [of those choices]. So figure out what you’re going to do!’ I noticed that several students chose to sing the song rather than play their recorders. . . .

Deena invited the students to review playing ‘Canoe Song,’ which they would also be performing as a partner song with ‘Land of the Silver Birch.’ After reviewing both songs, Deena explained, ‘So again you have lots of choices for this one. You could play “Canoe Song.” You could play “Land of the Silver Birch.” You could sing “Canoe Song.” You could sing “Land of the Silver Birch.” Or you could do a combination.’ After the students finished performing, Deena asked them, ‘How many of you played “Land of the Silver Birch” AND “Canoe Song?” Hands down. How many of you just played “Land of the Silver Birch?” How many of you just played “Canoe Song?” And how many of you also added some singing? All right, so a combination of lots!’

Next Deena announced they would try playing ‘Jingle Bell Rock,’ to which a small boy on the far side of the room responded by shouting out, ‘I love this one!’ Richelle, a spunky Asian tomboy sitting near the back of the room, asked, ‘Can we sing?’ Deena responded, ‘You may sing if you choose to. You may play if you choose to. Again, if it’s too tricky, you can always sing. If you get lost, you can always sing!’ As the class performed the song, many began singing rather than playing as the song went on. By the end of the first repetition (‘Mix and a-mingle...’), there were only a handful of kids still playing. Deena must have noticed the students struggling because at the end of the song she told them, ‘If you take this paper home and practice over the next few days, then on

Friday we'll see if we're going to play this one [for the "recorder caroling" in other classrooms].' (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012)

Deena offers students a choice in their mode of music-making beginning in the early grades.

The following fieldnote excerpt was from a second-grade class:

Deena led the students in reviewing the melody to 'A Very Sad Boy Am I' as they entered the music room and sat on the blue carpet circle on the floor. When they were seated, Deena began modeling a rhythmic ostinato on a floor tom drum as the song continued. When the song was done, Deena said to the students, 'Everybody take your two hands and go like this;' she modeled patting and chanting the ostinato with rhythm syllables ('Du-ta-de-ta Du'), inviting the students to whisper and pat it. 'Keep it going!' After the students finished accompanying Deena's singing with the ostinato and echoed a few more rhythm patterns with syllables, she asked them if anyone could think of another two-beat rhythm that they could pat. Ava, a tiny waif of a girl with white-blond curly hair, excitedly raised her hand and suggested 'Du-de Du-de,' which the class chanted and patted while Deena sang the song again. Next Jalisa raised her hand, hesitated, and suggested 'Du-de Du-de', and Deena asked her, 'Du-de Du-de? Same as Ava's?' Jalisa nodded and said, 'Yeah,' so Deena invited the students to chant/pat it while she sang. I noticed that all but two students were patting the rhythm accurately. Avery suggested 'Du-ta-de Du-de' as the next pattern, which was much more challenging for the students. I noticed Tom, Avery, Rin, and a few others could do it accurately. . . . Mari then suggested 'Du—ta Du-ta-de,' and Deena said to the class, "This time you choose! This time either do the 'Du—ta Du-ta-de' OR sing the song. If you want to be really tricky, you could do both! You could tap it AND sing." Before moving on to the next activity,

Deena invited the students to move with flow and sing the song one last time, during which she hummed chord roots rather than singing the melody with them. (fieldnotes, November 15, 2012)

Offering students a choice between singing, playing, patting, or other modes of music-making allowed the students to not only choose a difficulty level that was appropriate for them but also to choose the way in which they wanted to participate. This enabled the students to choose an activity that they enjoyed and/or with which they felt most comfortable, which in turn helped them feel successful and confident in their music-making.

Knowing Her Students

Implicit in Deena's view of students as individuals is the fact that, despite seeing them for as little as 60 minutes each week, she knows a considerable amount about each and every one of her students. She is aware of their differing needs, interests, strengths, and weaknesses and responds accordingly in her interactions with them in the classroom. Deena also frequently mentions that she wants to give each student individual attention and "interact with each student, one on one" (email journal, December 21, 2012).

Responding to Student Needs

I wrote the memo cited in the previous paragraph after seeing Deena interact with one boy, Wyatt. From the first time I observed Wyatt's fifth-grade class, I noticed that he typically alternated between an unfocused daze-like state and one of hyperactivity and silliness. After I happened to make a comment to Deena about Wyatt's behavior, she informed me that he had suffered a closed-head injury and that this was the reason for his unusual behavior. This also made it difficult for Wyatt to learn because he had trouble remembering things. For example, each time Wyatt's class entered the music room and began forming rows in assigned spots, he

often would approach Deena to ask, “Where do I sit?” Despite having music class twice every week, Wyatt was unable to remember his assigned seat. One day I noticed that Deena had gotten to the point where she anticipated his need for this reminder, and as soon as she saw him walk into the room, she inconspicuously said his name and gestured to his spot. This is just one of many examples of how Deena pays attention and responds to the needs of individual students.

Deena is sensitive to what each student needs in order to learn and grow. This is evidenced in the way she differentiates instruction to meet the educational and musical needs of each student, about which she says “I want to make sure that the kids get what they need” (interview, March 28, 2013). Because Deena sees students as individuals who are all “at different places” in their musical development, she interacts with each student in a way that is sensitive and responsive to his or her individual music learning needs.

Not only is Deena cognizant of what her students need educationally from her in order to progress in their music learning, but she also is aware of students’ emotional needs. She frequently talked about or demonstrated sensitivity to students’ level of confidence or frustration with various musical tasks. Deena explained,

There are several students that get frustrated when they are unable to do something and then they shut down. I am okay with them making mistakes, and I will acknowledge if something is not correct, but I try not to dwell on it. If I do a challenging activity and I see that there are students who are beginning to get frustrated, I will follow it up with an activity that I know they will succeed in. Or I will give them a choice in the challenging activity to take a step back and do something that they are able to do/figure out. (email journal, December 17, 2012)

There were many occasions in which I observed or heard Deena talk about emotional needs of specific students. I noticed while observing a first-grade class that Deena had complimented one student, Jimmy, on his “nice light [singing] voice” (fieldnotes, December 13, 2012) and later asked Deena about this. She explained,

He doesn't have a lot of self-confidence. And so yeah, if I'm able to see something that he's doing really well at, I feel like if I say something to him, it makes him feel better about himself and builds up his self-confidence. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Because Deena knew Jimmy as an individual, she was able to interact with him in a way that would provide him with the emotional support he needed.

In a fifth-grade class I noticed that one boy, Timothy, would always sit away from the other students at the edge of the room and often seemed to not be participating, yet I never saw Deena address this behavior. When I asked Deena about Timothy, she told me,

Timothy and his brother... The two of them, they have a lot of issues, and with them if I correct their behavior, they completely shut down. . . . If I correct him, even with something that shouldn't be a big deal, he won't participate for the rest of class. And so yeah, there are certain kids where I have to be really careful about how I approach it, and with Timothy, he's not doing anything to anybody else. Nobody's paying attention to what he's doing. It's not distracting them, and so yeah—if I leave him be, he always is listening. He's always paying attention. (interview, November 15, 2012)

On a different occasion I noticed Deena talking with a fifth-grade class about a mistake one girl, Manako, had made that caused her to be “out” of a game the class was playing (fieldnotes, November 13, 2012). When I asked Deena why she was not afraid to address Manako's mistake, she replied,

There are certain students that will still be upset if they get out, and if they were to get out, I wouldn't have approached it in the same way. I knew that Manako would be okay, and so I was able to make light of her getting out. (email journal, November 28, 2012)

Because Deena is aware of and sensitive to these (and other) individual students' emotional needs, she is able to respond and interact with them accordingly in a way that helps each student have a positive experience.

Responding to Student Interests

In addition to her sensitivity to individual student needs, Deena is also responsive to students' interests. She believes that increasing a student's interest in music will increase his or her motivation, resulting in greater musical achievement: "If they have more interest in it [music], they can also tap into it [their music potential] more" (interview, March 28, 2013). I had a conversation with Deena about how impressed I was by the singing ability of her students in which I asked her "How do you think it is that you're able to keep them engaged and excited about music, even the boys?" She answered, "I try to do things that I think they'll be into. . . . things that [I think are important for them to learn] but are things that they're also going to be excited about and that they're also really engaged in" (interview, December 4, 2012).

One way in which Deena engages her students by responding to their interests is in choosing repertoire to use in her classroom. In addition to traditional folk songs, I noticed that Deena also incorporates popular styles of music into her lessons. For example, her fourth-grade students were learning to play the theme songs from the movies "Harry Potter" and "Indiana Jones." When I asked her why she chose to have her students learn these songs, Deena responded,

If it's something like 'Indiana Jones,' a lot of times [especially] with the boys, the boys get more excited about it, and so they're more likely to work. And they work *hard* to get it because they're excited about it, because it's songs they like. (interview, December 4, 2012)

In addition to considering student interests when planning her lessons, Deena also responds to student interests "in the moment" while teaching. This happened most frequently when students would spontaneously start singing a particular song, and Deena then would incorporate that song into her lesson, such as in the following example from a fifth-grade class:

The students began trickling slowly into the classroom as they always did. Two girls entered the room and sat down on the floor in their row spots. One girl had sandy-brown, curly hair and was wearing a teal fuzzy fleece top with neon pink high-top sneakers, while the other girl had braces and dirty-blond hair in a ponytail and was wearing blue athletic pants and a grey t-shirt. They were chatting with each other as the other students came in and somehow began singing the 'ABCs' warm-up on their own. (It was in singing voice and in tune!) Deena noticed the two girls singing and said, 'You want to start with that? OK, stand up!' (fieldnotes, November 1, 2012)

I observed something quite similar with a different group of fifth-graders several weeks later:

"The students went to their row spots and began singing warm-ups. . . . As Deena announced the next warm-up (the "counting" exercise), Javon exclaimed, 'ABCs! ABCs!' After finishing the counting warm-up, Deena announced to the class, 'And let's finish with our alphabet!' (This appeared to be in response to Javon's request, since she had not done this exercise with the first rotation). Javon excitedly shouted, 'I can do this! I can do this!' (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012)

In talking about how she tries to engage specific students, Deena commented, “I want to just be able to tap into, ‘OK, this is what they're excited about.’ So if I can somehow get [them to] where they're participating in it, then maybe [they] will improve” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Student Engagement Can Look Different

Another way in which Deena is sensitive to individual differences among her students involves their engagement in music class. Rather than expecting all students to look and act the same, Deena acknowledges that engagement can look different from student to student. While some students always have their eyes on Deena and participate enthusiastically in her classroom, other students seem disengaged. Some may not be watching Deena, may not look like they are participating, may choose to sit away from the rest of the class, or even may be wandering around the room. At first I was surprised that Deena did not address this in class, as noted in the following memo: “Most of the fifth-graders sing the warm-ups, but a few do not. However, Deena never calls these students out. She lets them be, rather than forcing participation. Why does she not force the issue of participation?” (memo, November 13, 2012). Eventually I realized that this was her way of allowing each student to participate and learn in whatever way he or she felt comfortable.

One example of this involved a second-grade boy, Avery. Avery frequently would wander around the room, touching instruments and other equipment or talking to other students, but seemed to still be aware of what was going on in Deena’s lesson. When I asked her about this, Deena affirmed, “Yeah, he was still doing it [participating]! (*laughs*) Because he's always doing something! And even when he's like wandering around, he's still listening, and he's still paying attention. He just wants to do his own thing” (interview, November 15, 2012). Other teachers might have assumed that Avery was not listening and forced him to sit and participate

like the other students, but Deena knew that he was still engaged in learning even though he appeared not to be. I occasionally observed proof of this, such as one day when Deena was teaching a new song to the class and out of nowhere “from the back of the room, where he was messing around on tone bells, Avery shouted, ‘That’s triple!’” because he had identified that the song was in triple meter (fieldnotes, January 8, 2013).

I observed something similar from a fifth-grade boy named Elijah, a quiet “loner” of a fifth-grade boy.

During a listening and movement activity to ‘Trepak’ from ‘The Nutcracker,’ Elijah was standing over by the cabinets off to the side of the room (while the others sat in their row spots) and then began wandering around the back of the room. Next Deena played a Klezmer-like version of ‘Trepak’ for the students to move to, and Elijah again stood by the cabinets but was moving along this time. After the recording stopped, he sat with the class. When Deena asked the students what the differences were between the two versions, Elijah pointed out that it went from ‘major to minor.’ (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012)

Deena had known that, although it appeared that Elijah was not engaged in the lesson, he was in fact listening and thinking about the music. By allowing Elijah to participate in a way that was comfortable for him, Deena was able to get a “window” into Elijah’s musical understanding that might not have happened had she engaged him in the power struggle of forcing him to sit with the other students.

Deena said something similar about Timothy, the fifth-grade boy I previously described who sat away from the other students and often appeared to not be listening. When I asked Deena about Timothy, she said, “Oh yeah, he’s on! He knows it!. . . If I leave him be, he

always is listening. He's always paying attention. He can still do it [but chooses not to]" (interview, November 15, 2012). Rather than forcing Timothy to conform to the behavior standard of the other students, Deena is happy knowing he *can* do the task at hand and chooses not to cause him to "shut down" by forcing him to participate in the same way as the other students.

Deena also realizes that just because some students may appear to be acting inappropriately does not mean they are not engaged in learning. During one fifth-grade class, I noticed three boys smiling and obnoxiously singing into one another's faces during a warm-up. However, I noted that, despite their silliness, the boys were still singing accurately in their head voices! Deena had ignored this behavior and later mentioned it to me while chatting between classes, commenting, "They just think that they're goofing off, but they're singing so I don't say anything!" (fieldnotes, December 13, 2012).

Deena told me a similar story about when Wyatt was in second grade:

Deena said there were several [music education students from a nearby university] observing one day, and the class was singing 'Drunken Sailor' and putting movements to it. Before that day, Deena had never heard Wyatt use his singing voice, but that day she happened to hear him singing along accurately but on the words 'I really hate this goddam song!' Deena laughed as she recalled thinking, 'Oh, I guess he CAN sing!' (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012).

Although other teachers might have been upset by Wyatt's inappropriate language, especially on a day when outside visitors were present, Deena remembers it fondly as a valuable experience in which she was able to hear a manifestation of Wyatt's progress in singing. She realized that Wyatt was engaged in learning, just not in a way that looked or sounded like the other students,

because she acknowledges that engagement can look and sound quite different from student to student.

Individual Response and Assessment

Giving students a chance to respond independently in solo is another way in which Deena treats her students as individuals. Deena has her students perform alone, which I refer to as “individual response,” on a regular basis. Deena explains,

I try within the time that I see the classes to connect at least in some way with every student, or I try to at least, whether that's calling them to answer a question by name or giving them a pattern [to echo]—like a rhythm pattern or a tonal pattern—or giving them a chance to play an instrument. Just so that they have some experience where they're doing something by themselves. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Deena incorporated some type of individual response at least once on each of the schools days during which I observed in her classroom. In fact, individual student response happened in well over half of all of the classes I observed. Some even involved multiple opportunities for students to respond alone within a single class period.

Deena provides her students with opportunities to respond individually on a variety of skills. Some individual response activities involved students echoing short tonal/melodic patterns or singing short parts of songs in solo. Others involved students echoing or creating short rhythms in solo. Some had students echoing Deena's tonal or rhythm patterns and associating solfege or rhythm syllables. Others involved students improvising their own tonal or rhythm patterns. In other individual response activities, students were playing instruments alone or in small groups as accompaniment for the song the class was singing. Still others involved

students reading music notation in solo, creating and notating music alone, or taking rhythmic dictation independently

In most cases these individual responses were quite short, typically lasting no longer than 5 seconds per student, which allowed Deena to quickly give all of the students an opportunity to respond in solo. When the response was longer, making it impossible to get to all of the students in a single class period, Deena would give turns to four to eight students and then come back to the activity in future classes, continuing to give turns to those who still needed them.

These individual response activities provide Deena with ideal opportunities to differentiate instruction for her students, as discussed earlier in this chapter. When students all perform at the same time, they typically perform the same musical material, making differentiation of instruction nearly impossible. By giving each of her students an opportunity to perform alone, Deena is able to tailor these opportunities to meet individual needs by varying the difficulty level of the task for each student.

Sometimes these individual response opportunities were in a game format. Not only did this make the activity engaging and enjoyable for the students, but it also resulted in them being excited to perform alone, rather than nervous. In describing several singing games that Deena uses to elicit solo singing from her students, she said,

[These singing games are] a fun, non-threatening way, where they can sing [individually]. For me, the singing part is the most important. For them, there's some other thing that they're sort of focusing on. So it might be a contest of how many points they're getting [such as the bean bag toss game, in which each student echoes a tonal pattern and then tries to toss their bean bag into a basket in the middle of the room]. It might be a guessing game [where one student closes his or her eyes and has to figure out

who sang individually]. And when they're focused on those other things, the singing isn't as hard for them to do. They don't get nervous to do it. And then when it's just an echoing thing or 'give me a pattern' [within the context of a regular activity] and it's not a game, it's easier for them to do because we've done it as a game, and so they're used to it at that point. (interview, January 8, 2013)

While the students see singing games and other individual response opportunities as enjoyable and fun, Deena sees them as something else: "I use them because it gives me a chance to hear their individual singing voices [and other musical skills]" (interview, January 8, 2013).

By having each of her students perform individually, Deena also gives herself an opportunity to assess their musical progress over time. During these individual response activities, Deena says,

I'm trying to constantly assess them, both formally and informally, on where they're at with singing and rhythms and composition and dancing [and] instrument playing. And so I'll take notes. Some times I'll do it [using] a rating scale. Some times I'll just [make] a checkmark: Do they do it [or] do they not do it. Sometimes I'll just assess [informally] while I'm watching them do it. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Although the Forestview school district does not require elementary music teachers to assign students music grades on report cards until they are in fourth-grade, Deena chooses to assess all of her students on the skills she believes are important for students to master, such as singing voice and rhythmic development.

Additionally, Deena records these assessments in order to track student progress and allow her to differentiate instruction for each student. When I asked Deena what she does with her assessment data after she records it, she responded,

I use it from year to year to know which of the kids need more of a challenge, which of the kids need a little bit more help with certain things. So I use it for the individuals, as to like who needs [what], just to keep them all engaged and keep them all moving up.

(interview, January 8, 2012)

By hearing her students respond individually and assessing and tracking their musical development, Deena is able to get a picture of each student's past and current musical abilities in order to know what each student needs next. Even as an observer in Deena's classroom for roughly two months, I myself knew not only individual students' names but also had a fairly good sense of each of their levels of success with various tasks. I could anticipate the students who were accurately using their singing voices and those who were still struggling to find it. I knew which students tended to be high-achievers and which students likely needed some remediation. By observing her students' individual responses over a span of several years, Deena is able to develop a sense of each student's musical abilities and adapt her instruction in response to this, thus providing each student with instruction that is individualized in order to provide the optimal level of difficulty in order to maximize progress and minimize boredom or frustration.

Surprise

Although Deena hears each of her students perform individually on a regular basis and thus has a good sense of what each student can do, she still is occasionally surprised. During our many conversations about her students' musical abilities, there were numerous times when she mentioned that a student had been more successful than she had anticipated. For example, in viewing a video of second-grade students singing individually during one of her lessons, Deena commented that she was surprised by the singing of one boy, Peter, because he was "new [to the

school] this year” and “started out not really being able to match pitches, but he got there really quickly” (interview, November 15, 2012). Another example happened after Emily, a skillful pianist, had played a Mozart sonata for her fifth-grade classmates:

[After Emily finished playing,] Deena asked the class, ‘When some of us clapped because we thought the song was over [before the development section], did anyone notice what changed [in the music]?’ A small girl with a long ponytail of strawberry blond hair sitting next to Deena raised her hand and said, ‘Key’ (which was true, if I remember correctly). Then Mario, an impish boy with brown hair in a grey hoodie (who is usually making faces at classmates or otherwise goofing around) raised his hand and said, ‘Tonality?’ Deena responded, ‘Yes, it changed from major to minor!’ (fieldnotes, November 13, 2012)

I asked Deena if it was Mario on Tuesday who correctly guessed the tonality change in the Mozart Sonata that Emily played for the class, and she said, ‘That surprised me because I wasn’t expecting him to figure that out!’ (fieldnotes, November 15, 2012)

When I first started noticing how many times Deena referred to being surprised by a student’s ability, I wondered how this fit with her belief that all students are musical: “If she believes every student is musical, then wouldn’t she expect them all to succeed at some point? If she believes it’s a matter of time/practice, then why would she be surprised?” (memo, March 21, 2013). However, the more I thought about it in relation to her beliefs and interactions with students, I began to wonder, “Is this surprise a good thing? She knows that students often can do more than we expect so she provides/leaves those opportunities for surprise? She is only human and develops expectations for students based on her prior experiences with each of them BUT

remains open to the idea that those expectations can be misleading/misrepresentative of students' actual potential" (memo, March 21, 2013).

As I continued with my analysis, I realized that Deena leaves herself open to surprise because she does not limit what her students are able to achieve based on what she expects they can do. In fact, she mentioned several times that she plans activities in which she is not sure how successful the students will be. An example of this was an activity I observed in which Deena asked her second-grade students to work alone or in small groups to figure out the rhythmic notation for a chant they had learned by rote. A few days later I asked her about this activity:

HS: So when you were planning it, what were you expecting in terms of success from the kids?

DR: I didn't really know. Because they had seen the [notation for the rhythm] patterns [used in the chant] a couple times at this point. And so I figured they could probably get some of it, but I wasn't expecting them to get as much as they did. And then just to hear their conversations about how into it they were was just really cool! . . . I'm always amazed as to what's coming out of their mouths and how much they're actually thinking and figuring it out. . . . And again, like a couple kids really surprised me because I didn't think they'd be able to get it as easily as they were, and then they stepped up as the leaders in their groups, and they were the ones helping the ones that I thought would probably be able to get right away. . . . It's interesting to see which kids step up and which kids get it right away and which kids don't, and it's not always the same kids as when we're in a whole group together. (interview, November 13, 2012)

As I tried to make sense of this, I wrote my thoughts in the following memo:

[In reference to Deena's statement, 'I'm always amazed as to what's coming out of their mouths and how much they're actually thinking and figuring it out':] So by providing these opportunities where she's not sure they can do it, she allows herself to be surprised by what they can do! Rather than limiting what they can do by going into things with predisposed expectations (which may essentially act as limitations), she actually provides freedom and space for students to exceed what she might have expected??? (memo H, March 27, 2013)

This was confirmed in my follow-up interview with Deena the following day, in which she was talking about giving individual students opportunities to create/improvise: "Even when I don't necessarily think they're going to be able to give it [an accurate/successful response] to me, a lot of times they can" (interview, March 28, 2013). So rather than holding her students back by assuming she knows their capabilities, Deena provides them with challenges that she is not sure they will be able to achieve just to see what happens.

This possibility of being surprised by what her students can do is actually one of the things Deena enjoys most about working with them. When I asked what her favorite thing is about teaching elementary general music, Deena mentioned,

[When students] give me an answer or a response that I didn't think they'd be able to get, that I would think would be more challenging than what they're able to do. Like if I'm giving [tonal or rhythm] patterns on neutral syllables, and they spontaneously give me the syllables back. Or they'll compose something or improvise something that I feel is very musical and wasn't what I was expecting them to give, and they can go and do it on their own. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Deena also experiences this surprise in the opposite direction—being surprised when a student does not do something she thought they would be able to do. However, rather than letting this limit her expectations for that student, she uses it to inform her instruction by remediating so that the student can be successful at a different difficulty level. Deena also acknowledges that just because a student is unsuccessful at a task at a certain point in time does not mean they are incapable of success at that task. For example, she wrote about two students whose struggle with singing had surprised her:

In *The Rattlin' Bog*, a few students (5th grade) such as Hope and Saniya were not singing their solo. Instead it was more of a speaking voice, or not on pitch. They are both strong singers, and I didn't expect them to struggle. I think, though, that it was more of a defense mechanism in that either they weren't as comfortable with the words in their solo and because they were afraid they were going to make a mistake, focused on the words rather than the melody, or they were nervous to sing their solo part in front of their peers. (On a side note, when I had them come in a small group with only people singing their solos, they sang confidently and in their singing voices.) (email journal, November 21, 2012)

In this instance, Deena recognized that there may be factors preventing students from demonstrating their actual ability at a certain task and thus they likely are capable of more than she sees or hears. Whether she is surprised by students' success or by their struggles, either way Deena does not let her expectations for students' abilities limit what she believes is possible for them to achieve.

Summary

While Deena believes that all of her students have musical potential, she believes that their differing backgrounds, prior experiences with music, effort, and confidence levels result in differences in their present musical abilities. Because Deena believes that all of her students have unique backgrounds, experiences, current abilities, strengths, and interests, she believes that the instruction she provides in her classroom must be responsive to students as individuals. Similarly, Deena believes that what qualifies as musical “success” may vary from student to student.

Deena provides all students with opportunities to be successful in her classroom both by varying the difficulty level of the tasks in which she engages her students and by including activities that allow her students to interact with music in a variety of ways. By including a variety of difficulty levels and types of musical activities in her classes, Deena hopes that each student will have a chance to interact with music in a way in which he or she can be successful and which he or she enjoys. Deena’s sensitivity to students’ individual needs and interests helps her connect with and engage all students, and her frequent incorporation of individual response enables her to develop a sense of what each student knows and is able to do so that she can provide appropriate learning opportunities in the future.

CHAPTER 6: “I TRY TO MAKE THE MUSIC CLASSROOM A POSITIVE ONE”: THE POWER OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Deena believes that all of her students have musical potential and can develop the ability to make and understand music. In order for this to happen, however, she believes that students’ musical potential must be nurtured in a positive learning environment. Deena’s words echoed this on numerous occasions. She helps all students feel comfortable participating despite their differences in ability by “making sure that music class is a fun, low-pressure place. . . . I want the environment to be a positive one” (email journal, November 21, 2012). In my observations in Deena’s classroom, I noticed that her students did not seem to be intimidated by challenges; in fact, they seemed to welcome challenges and were excited to conquer them. When I mentioned this to her, she explained, “I think it’s all about just the atmosphere in here” (interview, January 8, 2013).

Deena believes that helping students to succeed musically depends on building a positive classroom environment in which students feel comfortable and confident in their own abilities. Creating this type of environment is one of Deena’s goals for her program: “When [students] come into music class, I want them excited to learn in the positive learning environment that I hope I have created for them” (email journal, January 31, 2013). In observing the positive learning environment in Deena’s classroom, I have noted three subthemes: (1) Her classroom is a safe place in which to learn; (2) It is one in which students feel supported; and (3) It is one in which students feel empowered. When these three components are in place, the result is an environment in which maximum learning can occur because students feel cared for, respected, valued, and motivated, which, in turn, leads to greater student success.

A Safe Place to Learn

In order for a student to learn, Deena believes that he or she first must feel safe in the learning environment. This not only includes physical safety but, just as important, emotional safety. In describing what needs to happen for students to be successful musically, Deena said,

I think it has to be an environment where they feel comfortable to do it, where they don't feel threatened. They feel like they can give an answer and be wrong, and they won't be laughed at. And then once that's in place, I feel like then the foundations can get started.

And then they can start to learn. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Deena believes that students need to feel safe and comfortable in her classroom in order to facilitate the development of their musical abilities. When discussing the type of classroom that maximizes student success, Deena explained,

I try to make the music classroom a positive one. Especially when the students are creating/composing/singing/chanting alone and/or in small groups, the students know that it is NOT okay to laugh or make mean comments. I do not want students to be afraid to contribute because they are afraid that others will make comments or treat them with disrespect. (email journal, November 10, 2012)

I noticed that Deena has instilled the importance of respect in her students to the point where they often do not need her in order to be reminded of this:

Later Ava got 'out' [of the game], and Tom teasingly said 'Ava!' Bryson heard him and with crossed arms and a furrowed brow scolded, 'It's not all right to laugh!' (fieldnotes, December 6, 2012)

Deena establishes this safe, respectful environment from the first day students enter her classroom as kindergarteners. She hopes that making students feel safe and comfortable at an

early age will help them continue to feel safe and comfortable as they proceed through the upper elementary grades, when social issues may begin to hinder the learning environment.

If the music room is always considered that safe place, then as [the students] get older, they still have those memories from early on, and so it still is that safe place. It's still that place where they can have fun and learn. (interview, December 4, 2012)

In contrast to students who have been at Thoroughgood Elementary for several years and are accustomed to the safe, comfortable environment that Deena creates, she notices that new students who transfer from other schools often need time to develop that feeling of safety in her classroom. "Sometimes a student will come to me from a different school where the environment was different. These students do not always feel as comfortable to contribute as those who have been with me a while" (email journal, November 10, 2012). Deena notes that, until new students feel safe in her classroom, they may not develop their musical abilities to their fullest potential. In describing things that hinder students' musical success, Deena stated,

A lot of times if they come from a different school, and music [class] was different at their other school, some times it takes a while before they fully buy into what we do here. Like they may not want to sing by themselves or give an answer by themselves. Or even just the calm, safe music atmosphere... that we tend to have, I feel like some times they don't—It takes a while before they buy into it. And then once they do, then they can start being successful. (interview, March 28, 2013)

At times even students who have been in Deena's classroom for several years may lose this sense of emotional safety, which in turn inhibits their musical development. I recorded an example of this on my first day in Deena's classroom:

Deena mentioned to me that she is having a hard time with the fifth graders because they are being mean to one another. She thinks this is likely related to the fact that they don't come to music as intact classes but as mixed groups due to the rotation between general music, instrumental music, and world language; thus they lack a consistent, cohesive group dynamic. Deena senses that, because of the issues with meanness, the kids seemed to be hesitant to sing because they are afraid they might get made fun of by the other kids. Deena commented that she feels that this is a cause for why the 5th graders' progress is not what she would have hoped: 'My 2nd and 3rd graders are doing some of [the same content and skills] they're doing.' (fieldnotes, October 30, 2012)

In this instance, Deena felt that, due to circumstances outside her control, she was unable to create a safe and comfortable learning environment for the fifth-grade students and that this was hindering the development of their musical abilities, keeping them from achieving as much as they might be able to in a more positive learning environment.

Deena believes that when students are burdened by the fear of teasing or judgment from their classmates, they will not succeed to their greatest potential. Additionally, they may not display their full capabilities, as in the previously mentioned example in which Deena explained that two fifth-grade girls may have chosen to speak rather than sing their solo “because they were afraid they were going to make a mistake ... or they were nervous to sing their solo part in front of their peers” (email journal, November 21, 2012). Deena acknowledged that her students were capable of more than they had shown in class and that this likely was because they did not feel comfortable in the learning environment, in large part due to the fear of making mistakes in front of their classmates.

Freedom to Make Mistakes

As seen in the previous example, an important part of helping students feel emotionally safe in Deena's classroom is giving them permission to make mistakes. In addition to communicating to students that "it is NOT okay to laugh or make mean comments," Deena says, "I also let them know that it is okay if they are not perfect or if they make mistakes. . . . if they make a mistake it is no big deal" (email journal, November 10, 2012). By communicating to students that mistakes are "no big deal," Deena gives them freedom to make mistakes and to do so without repercussion.

I try to make [the classroom] a safe environment for them where they feel like if they make a mistake, it's OK. Because we are *all* making mistakes at some point. I'll make a mistake; they make a mistake. And I try to instill in the students not to laugh at each other, especially when we're doing singing alone or chanting alone, so they feel like they can give an answer [and] if it's not correct, that's OK. They can try again later. And then they won't completely shut down because they made a mistake and people laughed at them. (interview, January 8, 2013)

I frequently observed instances in Deena's classroom when she conveyed to the students that mistakes are normal. In a kindergarten class many students were making mistakes at a challenging activity, so Deena stopped the activity and asked the class, "If you make a mistake by accident, is that OK?" to which the students chimed back, "Yes!" (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012). During a difficult rhythm activity at which many second grade students were struggling, Deena asked the class, "If you make a mistake, does that mean that you're not good at the game?" to which the students chorused back "No!" Deena continued, "No, because some

times—and it hasn't happened yet in this class, but some times I get out, too!" (fieldnotes, December 6, 2012)

This example shows a key way in which Deena normalizes mistakes: by letting the students see HER make mistakes. Deena explained, "If I make a mistake, I will often let [the students] know. 'Even I make mistakes'" (email journal, November 10, 2012). By calling attention to the fact that even the teacher makes mistakes, Deena reassures the students that it is perfectly fine and in fact normal for them to make mistakes. I even observed an example of a student pointing out that Deena had made a mistake in a third-grade class:

Deena led the students in reviewing the melody to 'One Bottle of Pop,' along with the movement they would do with the big stretchy band. (This movement aligned with the chord roots, DO-DO-SO-DO, tapping knees-knees-floor-knees.) When they finished this, a boy named Yakim pointed out that Deena had done the co-operband movement backwards. (It should have been floor-floor-knees-floor.) Deena responded matter-of-factly, 'I know, I made a mistake. Let's see if you can fix my mistake!' (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012)

Another example of Deena modeling mistakes for her students happened in a second-grade class. Deena was modeling a melody on her recorder for the students and let out a squeak after not covering a hole completely; she responded to this to by smiling, saying, "Oops," and then continuing to play (fieldnotes, March 28, 2013).

Not only does Deena model mistakes for her students, but she also models appropriate and healthy reactions to mistakes. Instead of embarrassment or frustration, Deena reacts with laughter and persistence. During a kindergarten class in which Deena was asking volunteers to create a beat movement for the class to do, one student suggested an idea so tricky that even

Deena struggled with it, giggling and exclaiming to the class, “Miss Ridge made mistakes there, too! Keep going!” (fieldnotes, January 8, 2013). While leading a body percussion activity in a second-grade class, Deena messed up, laughed, and said, “Oops! I forgot what it was!” (fieldnotes, March 28, 2013).

Deena’s modeling of positive reactions to mistakes seems to rub off on many of her students. While in Deena’s classroom, I observed many instances in which students laughed at their own mistakes. One example of this happened when Deena was giving her second-grade students turns at playing an alternating bordun on a xylophone:

Deena called Gage and Serafina to play the xylophone part next. They were playing accurately throughout most of the song, but near the ending they both got confused and started giggling. When the song was done, Gage good-humoredly announced, ‘We messed up!’ (fieldnotes, December 13, 2012)

Some teachers might not want to call attention to students’ mistakes for fear that they might embarrass them. However, because mistakes are considered normal in Deena’s classroom, she is not hesitant to address them with her students. The following fieldnote excerpt describes a fifth-grade class playing a rhythm game:

They started a practice round, but Manako made a mistake, to which Deena responded, ‘Lucky that was just practice. Manako wasn’t quite on the snaps.’ ‘Now because Manako made a mistake, everybody subtract one from your number.’

On the first ‘real’ round of playing the game, Beth made a mistake, but no one seemed to react, tease, etc. Then David messed up, but everyone laughed with him. All were smiling in a good-natured way, including David. (fieldnotes, November 13, 2012)

Deena later explained,

I make sure when teaching this game (as well as others) that we talk about it not being a big deal if you are out. We go over how difficult, especially at first, this game is. . . . We talk about how even I (the teacher) will get out sometimes. This is a game where the students feel comfortable playing. They enjoy it, and they are not afraid to make a mistake and get out. (email journal, November 21, 2012)

While making mistakes does not bother some students, others need more reassurance from Deena. I observed this most often in her kindergarten classes. The following fieldnote excerpt shows Deena's reaction to a kindergarten student who accidentally gave away an answer to a guessing game by pointing:

Lexi was the "Grizzly Bear," pretending to sleep in the middle of the circle. At the end of the song, she opened her eyes and correctly guessed who had tapped her during the song, but another student shouted, 'Sabrina pointed!' Deena responded, 'No, that time I don't think so. I think that time Lexi figured it out. And kindergarteners, are we going to point to the person who it was?' A few students chimed in, 'No!' Deena noticed Sabrina crying near the door and walked over to her, saying to the class 'And you know what, is it OK if we make a mistake by accident?' Several students answered, 'Yes!' As Deena crouched down to console Sabrina, she continued, 'Because does everybody make mistakes?' A handful of students responded, 'Yeah!' Deena continued, 'Yeah! And you know what? Miss Ridge makes mistakes all the time!' A little boy chimed in, 'I make mistakes every day!' Deena asked the class, 'Would you raise your hand if you make mistakes some times?' and almost all students raised their hands. The same little boy exclaimed, 'I make mistakes every night!' Deena continued, 'So kindergarteners, we just learned this game yesterday, and so some times we are gonna make mistakes. But is that

OK? Yeah, we're just gonna keep practicing until we get better!' (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012)

Something similar happened in another kindergarten class playing the same game the following week, in response to which Deena told the class, “Sometimes mistakes happen. Does Miss Ridge make mistakes? Yes! Do we get mad when people make mistakes by accident? No! We just keep learning!” (fieldnotes, November 15, 2012)

Some students need even more personal reassurance from Deena that their mistakes are normal. One particular student, a second-grader named Ava, was particularly afraid to make mistakes. Deena described Ava to me as “very hesitant. It’s like she’s always afraid she’s going to get the answer incorrect. She’s very sensitive” (interview, November 13, 2012). Because of her sensitivity, Ava takes mistakes seriously and often needs extra reassurance from Deena:

DR: She makes one mistake, and she completely shuts down, and then I have to build her back up! [laughs]

HS: Like what ways do you build her back up?

DR: She has a really good singing voice, so maybe I'll give her like an echoing pattern or if I see her doing something, and I give her a thumbs-up. Just something small like that, and that’s usually enough to make her happy again. (interview, January 8, 2013)

I happened to be in the classroom on a day when Ava made a mistake and Deena had to “build her back up.” The class was playing a rhythm game, about which I wrote in my fieldnotes:

Ava got ‘out’ and was visibly upset. Her head was hung and her shoulders slumped. I noticed Deena lean over to Ava and whisper inaudibly in her ear in what seemed to be an attempt to ‘build her back up.’ (fieldnotes, March 28, 2013)

Later that day I brought this up in an interview with Deena:

HS: I had been reading through when you talked about Ava in the past and how you have to build her back up—

DR: Uh-huh! And then it happened again today!

HS: What did you say to her?

DR: I said, ‘You know, I had problems with this game when I started, too, and it just took some practice.’ Because yeah, she asked when we started [to play the game], she was like, ‘Do I have to play because I always get out, and then people laugh.’

HS: Nobody laughed at her!

DR: Nobody laughed, yeah, and I told her that, too. I said, ‘Did you see? Nobody laughed.’ And she was like, ‘Yeah, they didn’t.’ And then I said, ‘It takes practice, but eventually you’re going to get better!’” (interview, March 28, 2013)

A Supportive Place to Learn

In addition to feeling safe in their learning environment, Deena believes that students must also feel supported. Because Deena believes that confidence and self-esteem are necessary in order to develop one’s musical ability to the maximum extent possible, she strives to create a classroom environment in which each student develops this sense of musical confidence and self-esteem. Deena explained,

Once they feel safe and confident, then it’s OK if they make a mistake, and then they’re more likely to want to contribute something and want to try. And once they start trying, they’re going to find out that eventually they’ll be able to do it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Teacher-Student Relationship

An important part of helping students feel supported in the music classroom is the relationship they develop with their music teacher. Deena believes that developing a positive relationship with her students helps them “buy in” to what they do in her classroom, thus increasing their musical achievement. Deena builds this positive relationship in many ways, most prominently through showing her students respect and giving them each individual attention.

The most basic way Deena builds a positive relationship with her students is by showing them respect. In all of my hours observing in Deena’s classroom, I never heard her degrade or “talk down” to a student. Her demeanor always was respectful and positive. For example, during one fifth-grade class, several students were not participating in singing a song they were learning for the fifth-grade musical. Deena noticed these students and, rather than singling them out and commanding them to sing, she simply smiled and called out to the whole class in a sing-song-y voice, “We’re all singing!” (fieldnotes, January 8, 2013). Even when addressing occasional behavior issues, Deena remained calm and respectful, always preserving students’ dignity.

Deena also shows her students respect simply by validating their ideas. For example, during a discussion with a kindergarten class, one student gave an incorrect answer to Deena’s question, to which Deena responded by saying, “That’s a great idea, but it’s not the answer” (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012). Rather than discrediting the student’s statement by saying “No, you’re wrong,” Deena subtly affirmed that the student’s statement had value. Deena responded similarly when students interjected random comments, as in the following excerpt from a fifth-grade class:

Deena was doing a “Mystery Musician” contest in which she gave the students clues about an unnamed musician (Buddy Holly in this case) for them to figure out who it is. Deena displayed the clues on the screen, having volunteers read each one aloud for the class. One fact was that February 3 was the day he died. Yuliana raised her hand and said, ‘February 3 is my birthday!’ Another girl announced, ‘That’s my mom’s birthday!’ Deena responded by smiling and politely saying, ‘Oh, really? Interesting!’ (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012)

One might see this as a brief, meaningless interaction, but I interpreted this as a small yet significant way in which Deena communicates to her students that their ideas and voices are valued.

Another way in which Deena develops positive relationships with her students is by giving each of them individual attention.

I try to interact with all of my students individually. I’ll try to like—if I see them in the hall, I’ll ask them how their day is going. . . . Just to have that one-on-one connection with them I feel like helps. When I have that connection with the students, I feel like they’re more willing to [participate fully in class]. (interview, January 8, 2013)

When I later asked Deena why connecting with her students individually was so important to her, she explained,

I really believe that it’s important to develop that relationship with the students because I want them to do a lot for me [in class], and I feel like they’ll do it if they have that sense of trust. If they enjoy interacting with me and enjoy music class, the more willing and more likely [they are] to do what I ask them to do [in class]. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Deena believes that developing an individual relationship with each of her students will help them trust her and thus be more willing to participate fully in class, especially when facing challenges and taking risks. Additionally, this individual attention helps each student feel valued, as in the following conversation that took place when I asked Deena how she keeps her students so engaged and excited about singing:

DR: It helps that I've been at this school for so long. My first couple years the fourth and fifth graders would check out because they weren't *my* students. . . .

HS: And it sounds like having been here for so long helps?

DR: Mmm-hmm. . . . Because they see me every day. You know, we talk. I try to do activities where I'm constantly calling on individuals where they feel like they matter.

(interview, December 4, 2012)

In showing her students respect, forming one-on-one connections with them, and making them “feel like they matter,” Deena develops a positive relationship with her students that helps them feel supported in her classroom.

Building Student Confidence and Self-esteem

Deena believes that students are more likely to be successful when they have confidence in their own musical abilities. According to Deena, “When [students are] confident about [music], they're more likely to succeed” (interview, January 8, 2013). Thus strengthening students' musical confidence and self-esteem is an important way in which Deena creates a supportive learning environment.

Focus on what they CAN do. One way in which Deena helps build her students' musical confidence and self-esteem is by focusing on their musical strengths rather than their musical weaknesses. In order to increase students' confidence and motivation, Deena says, “I

want to be able to focus on what they CAN do rather than what they can't" (interview, November 15, 2012). By focusing on what students CAN do, Deena believes she can increase their musical self-esteem, which in turn enhances their motivation, causing them to be "more likely to try the [thing they struggle with] later on, and hopefully with practice be able to get it" (email journal, December 17, 2012).

When I asked Deena to describe a student for whom she focuses on what he or she CAN do, she said the following:

I have a student who struggles to find his singing voice and doesn't like to sing alone in front of others (a 3rd grader), but when playing xylophones, figures out the parts quickly and is a strong player. When it is time for xylophone parts he is always volunteering.

Allowing him to play the xylophone part gives him an opportunity to succeed, as well as helps with his self-esteem, knowing that he is able to do well with this part. (email journal, December 17, 2012)

Similarly, if Deena notices a student struggling with a particular activity, she explains, "I try to celebrate successes among all students [so] I will give them a chance to shine with another activity later on in the class. I want the students to leave feeling happy about at least one thing that they were able to accomplish in class" (email journal, November 21, 2012).

One specific way in which Deena enhances students' musical confidence and self-esteem by focusing on what they CAN do is through praise and calling attention to positive things. I observed an example of this when first-grade students were playing a singing game in which they were taking turns singing tonal patterns alone. I noticed that the first few students who had turns used their speaking voices rather than their singing voices. Instead of pointing this out, Deena invited the whole group to echo a few tonal patterns and then would make a comment

after each pattern they echoed: “I hear a great light voice from James! . . . Oh, Ellie’s nice light voice, too! . . . Alex’s voice is nice and light! . . . So is Easton’s! . . . Looks like Mrs. Wing’s whole class has a light voice today!” (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012). By praising the positive rather than criticizing the negative, Deena was able to increase student success while enhancing the students’ confidence and self-esteem.

Even if students are not successful at a given task, Deena finds something positive on which to focus. After a kindergarten boy attempted to echo a rhythm but was inaccurate, Deena did not say a single word about his inaccuracy and instead said, “Jackson was really concentrating on that pattern!” (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012). Another example is when students are learning “a challenging chord root xylophone part” but “are not able to get it the first few times,” about which Deena explained, “I will talk of the difficulty of the xylophone part, and will focus on the singing of the melody as what is going well” (email journal, December 17, 2012). By helping each student feel successful through focusing on what they CAN do, Deena believes her students will be more likely to persist and improve at the things with which they are struggling. “When they are happy and when they feel confident in one activity, it tends to make them happier and more confident in the other activities as well” (email journal, January 31, 2013).

Persistence and conveying confidence. Because Deena believes that every one of her students has musical potential and can develop musical skills, she shows intense persistence in helping each of her students to improve and experience musical success. In discussing the previously mentioned student whom Deena described as “just [not] that musical,” Deena said, “I keep trying to find a way to get her a little bit higher, to teach her a little bit more. It hasn’t

worked yet, but... I will continue to do it! I don't want to lose hope!" (interview, October 30, 2012).

Conveying this persistence to her students is another way in which Deena helps build their musical confidence and self-esteem. In many of Deena's words and actions in the classroom, she implicitly communicates to her students that they WILL succeed. The following is an example from a fourth-grade class:

Once the students had gotten settled in their row spots, Deena began the class by announcing the names of the students who had earned their recorder 'black belts.' After all the recipients had been recognized, Jaedyn asked Deena if they were the class with the most black belts of the whole 4th grade, so she asked the students who had earned black belts to raise their hands. It appeared that Deena noticed some disappointment in the faces and body language of the students not raising their hands because she then said 'There are plenty of people with belts left to earn, and I know that we are all going to get there some time soon.' (fieldnotes, October 30, 2012)

Something similar happened in a different fourth-grade class: After a student blurted out, "Did everybody in this class get their black belt?" Deena responded, "We're getting close, but not everybody yet" (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012). Deena's use of the word "yet" sends an implicit message to her students that they will all be able to succeed eventually. Deena also emphasizes the role of effort and practice in helping her students succeed. After watching a fourth-grade student struggle to play a song on her recorder, Deena said to her, "We'll get there. It's going to get easier and easier as we practice" (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012).

Deena communicates to her students that she believes that they all will succeed eventually, which in turn helps the students to believe this as well. Deena feels that students'

confidence in their own musical abilities is strengthened when they can sense her confidence in their musical potential:

HS: I'm wondering does your belief that they all can do something, do you find that that rubs off on them? Or are they skeptical? Do they believe that?

DR: I think they do. Again with the new students some times it takes a while because they do tend to be more skeptical. . . . But yeah, I think they believe that *I* believe it, and so I think that does help with most of the students. (interview, March 28, 2013)

I observed an example of this after a class of third-grade students struggled with a singing/movement activity: Deena commented, "Close! But we'll get there," to which one boy responded by chiming in, "Yeah, we'll get there all right!" (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012).

Student Interactions

Not only does Deena create a supportive learning environment through her own interactions with her students, but she also does so by encouraging positive and supportive interactions among her students. In explaining how she creates an environment that maximizes student success, Deena said,

[The students] interact with me one-on-one, with each other in partners, small groups, as well as a large group. This helps to create a cohesive, comfortable environment where they get used to working together. When they work together and interact in a positive way, they are more likely to want to contribute ideas, to feel safe doing so, as well as enjoy and encourage the ideas of others. They become excited for each other when they are successful and when they contribute or create musical ideas that work well. (email journal, November 10, 2012)

Students helping one another. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Deena's students do notice differences among their musical abilities. However, rather than causing the students to judge themselves by comparing their own abilities to those of other students, this sensitivity to ability differences seems to manifest itself in students helping one another. When I asked Deena if her students notice differences in ability, she explained,

With all of the individual responses that I ask the students to give me, they do hear and see responses/answers/music from each other. Some students are able to match pitches exactly, while others aren't. Some students are able to give the correct answers about pieces of music such as what the tonality is, while others struggle. They usually don't say anything about it [when they notice differences in ability], but they will definitely observe it. Sometimes we will do group work, and they help each other. (email journal, November 21, 2012)

Deena often makes it a point to encourage her students to help one another. One example of this happened in a fourth-grade class:

Deena said to the class, 'All right, it looks like we're finding our spots!' As the students got settled with their recorders on their circle spots, Deena continued, 'Take a look at [the notation for] "Ode to Joy," and would you raise your hand if you can tell the class how you finger high-C?' About half of the students in the class excitedly wave their hands in the air. 'How do you finger high-C, Serena?' Serena carefully placed her fingers on her recorder and proudly held it up. 'She got it! Everybody, it's your middle finger and your thumb. Would you show me and make sure your neighbors are doing it the right way?' The students concentrate on placing their fingers and then begin looking around at others. A boy in a blue plaid shirt and a girl in purple top turn to each other,

hold out their recorders, and nod in affirmation. A girl with long wavy hair notices that the boy in the green shirt next to her is confused, and she leans over to point at his fingers, showing him the holes to cover. (fieldnotes, November 13, 2012)

Later I had a chance to talk to Deena about this and ask why she encourages the students to help one another. She replied,

The kids don't have any problems asking each other for help when they're working in small groups, and it's not a big deal if somebody needs help and somebody else can help them. The kids that need the help feel better because they can get the song, and then the kids that are giving the help feel good because they get to help somebody. So yeah, they're constantly looking at each other. So it's not like 'Oh, you're doing it wrong.' It's 'This is just I'm helping you' type of thing. (interview, December 4, 2012)

In fact the students are often excited to help one another succeed:

In chatting after lunch while waiting for her first afternoon class to arrive, Deena mentioned to me that there was a new student and that she was unsure of how that student would feel, being new to the classroom. Deena went on to tell me about a past student who had come to Thoroughgood in the middle of fourth-grade and therefore was way behind on learning recorder songs because most of the other students had already finished their black belts. However, the other kids made it their mission to help get her to black belt! (fieldnotes, January 8, 2013)

Celebrating success. Because Deena's students frequently help one another, they become invested in the accomplishments of their classmates. According to Deena, when students help one another, "they feel more involved in each other's work and activities, and they can celebrate each other's successes" (interview, December 4, 2012). Deena also feels that this

is why her students tend to not be intimidated when faced with challenges: “I think it’s all about just the atmosphere in here. The kids enjoy other students’ successes” (interview, January 8, 2013).

Student celebration of one another’s successes is a significant source of the supportiveness in Deena’s classroom. “If a student who is struggling with something for a while figures it out and/or is successful at it, many times other students will celebrate with them, such as give them a smile or a ‘good job’” (email journal, November 21, 2012). This celebration of success can even come in a form as big as applause. This was the case for the student mentioned previously in Chapter Four, who Deena recalled had struggled with singing for several years until finally finding his singing voice in second grade. Deena fondly remembered that when this happened, “the rest of the class was so excited that he sang that they all spontaneously started clapping!” (interview, October 30, 2012).

I frequently observed students celebrating one another’s successes in Deena’s classroom. I noted this several times in one fourth-grade class:

The students came in and went to their row spots with their recorders. After they had sat down, Deena announced, ‘Before we start playing, I’ve got some black belt certificates to give out,’ which was immediately met by applause and hoots from several students. As Deena announced each student’s name, the class clapped and cheered. (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012)

[Later in the class] Deena asked, ‘Is there anyone who wants to test for [the “William Tell Overture”] belt?’ Malcolm, the chubby blond-haired boy in the orange sweatshirt, volunteered, and Newton, a small chipmunk-cheeked boy with short dark hair, turned around and exclaimed, ‘Yeah! Go Malcolm!’” (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012)

I noticed these celebrations of success among the students in younger grades as well, such as during this second-grade class:

When time was almost up, Deena asked the students to stand to leave but then had them sit back down, announcing, 'Ava has a song to play for us!' Ava nervously walked to the piano and played the bass line (incorrectly in one spot) to 'Heart and Soul' while Deena played the melody. When Deena invited comments or questions for Ava from the other students, a girl named Isla exclaimed, 'That was really good, Ava! So amazing!'

(fieldnotes, December 19, 2012)

In a kindergarten class, Deena was having individuals suggest ideas of how to keep the beat, and when Zara, a little girl with freckles and red pigtails chose “on our heads,” Maya leaned over to her and loudly whispered, “Zara, that was a good idea!” (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012).

At times these celebrations of success were subtler. Some came in the form of “high-fives”:

After the [fifth-grade] class had finished singing through the final and longest verse of 'Rattlin' Bog,' I noticed two boys in the back row silently turn and high-five each other, which I think was probably for making it through the whole verse in one breath.

(fieldnotes, November 8, 2012).

Other celebrations came in the form of “thumbs-up”:

I noticed the kids giving one another encouragement after they took their turns singing during the bean-bag toss game. . . I even noticed Beth, who typically has a difficult time interacting and getting along with her classmates, give a 'thumbs-up' to another student!

(fieldnotes, December 13, 2012)

Sometimes the students encouraged one another even when they had not been successful, as in this fifth-grade class during which students were taking turns singing solos:

Andrew, a short boy with messy blond hair, glasses, and braces, volunteered to sing a solo and was the only one to not sing in tune. At first I worried that the other students might make fun of him. However, after Andrew sat down, Javon, a spunky looking little boy with a messy, curly mohawk, leaned over and said, 'You did good, Andrew!''

(fieldnotes, November 1, 2012)

By encouraging her students to help one another and celebrate one another's successes, Deena promotes a classroom environment in which students feel supported not only by their teacher but also by each other.

An Empowering Place to Learn

A learning environment in which students feel safe and supported sets the stage for them to learn music and develop musical skills. However, Deena believes that in order for students to achieve maximum musical success they must feel musically empowered. This sense of empowerment allows students to take full ownership of their music learning by helping them feel that they ARE musicians. I observed two main ways in which Deena helped her students feel empowered in the music classroom: (1) by giving students a voice and enabling them to contribute to the learning environment, and (2) by helping them develop identities as musicians.

Student Voice and Contribution

Deena wants students to "feel like they matter" in her classroom and believes that, by doing so, her students will be more engaged in and excited about their own music learning and skill-development (interview, December 4, 2012). For this reason, she tries to help her students feel that they are making a contribution to and have a voice in the music classroom. I observed

several ways through which Deena does this: (1) by honoring student ideas and opinions, (2) by allowing students to make decisions, (3) by having a “special helper” in each class, and (4) by providing opportunities for students to create and compose.

Honoring student ideas/opinions. According to Deena, student achievement is enhanced when students are allowed to contribute their own ideas in the music learning process. Deena explains, “When they are regularly contributing musical ideas, they are also contributing to their success” (email journal, November 10, 2012). By giving students the freedom to make mistakes, Deena hopes to create an environment in which students “are excited rather than nervous to contribute musical ideas” (email journal, November 10, 2012).

Because Deena wants students to feel that they have a voice in and are contributing something to the music classroom, she listens to and validates the opinions of her students. During my time in Deena’s classroom, I observed multiple instances during which Deena elicited the musical opinions of her students. The following example occurred after a fifth-grade class had listened to two different recordings of the same song—the traditional version of “Trepak” from “The Nutcracker” and a version played by a Klezmer band—and was discussing what differences they noticed between the two recordings:

Deena called on Abbey, a tiny strawberry-blond, who wrinkled her nose and said, ‘[The second recording] sounded worse.’ Without showing any agreement or disagreement with Abbey’s statement, Deena looked to the whole class and asked, ‘So how many of you liked the first version better than the second?’ About half of the students raised their hands. Deena continued, ‘OK, hands down. How many of you liked the second better than the first?’ Five or six hands went into the air. ‘And how many of you liked the two equally?’ Another five or so hands shot up. Deena smiled and said, ‘All right! So that’s

one good thing about music is that everybody has different opinions! (fieldnotes,
December 4, 2012)

By not only asking their opinions but also by validating them, Deena communicates to her students that their opinions matter and that she cares about what they think.

Another example of how Deena gives her students a voice by hearing their opinions is through performance debriefing. During my time in Deena's classroom, two different grade-levels had performances, and in both cases Deena led a discussion in those classes the next day in which she asked the students to talk about how they felt the performance had gone. The following is an example from a second-grade class:

'I want you to think back to yesterday and all the great things that happened at that performance, and I want to hear some things that you thought went really well.' Many of the kids raise their hands. *'So what is one thing that went really well, Jada?'* Jada replied, *'Um... our voices.'* Deena responded, *'Yeah, your voices sounded great up there on the stage! The whole audience could hear you, even the ones standing in the very back. They could all hear your voices. Chris?'* *'At the end we had to bow a long time,'* said Chris. *'At the end you had to bow so many times!'* One student shouted out, *'Four bows!'* No, *'five!'* shouted another. Deena responded, *'Five? Because people just kept clapping! They loved it!'* Next Deena called on Sergio, who said, *'The musical instruments.'* *'The instruments sounded great, too,'* Deena acknowledged. *'What other things, Leah?'* Leah said, *'Since we've been practicing since first grade [the song] "Land of the Silver Birch," it was perfect.'* Deena said, *'Yeah, "Land of the Silver Birch" was very solid. Other things? Mariam?'* Mariam answered, *'Everybody was smiling and clapping.'* Deena said, *'Yeah, the audience loved it, and they could*

understand your words. So the funny songs they were able to laugh at because they heard the words. . . . Let's go to Serafina.' Serafina said, *'This is not about what we did well, but we made mistakes.'* Deena responded, *'Yeah, were there mistakes that happened?'* Several kids chimed in, *'Yes!'* Deena continued, *'Let me ask you a question about those mistakes: When we made a mistake, did we look like we were making a mistake or did we keep going?'* Someone shouted out, *'Keep going!'* Deena continued, *'Yeah, and so even though there were some mistakes, that was a great thing that you did is that you just kept going and some of those mistakes—'* Someone interrupted, *'And no one noticed it!'* Deena agreed, *'The audience didn't even notice!. . . Now I want to tell you what I thought of the concert. You worked so hard to get there, and then when we were on that stage, I was so impressed with how well we stayed focused. I was impressed with how well you remembered the words to all of those songs that we did; we had a lot of songs [so] you remembered a lot of words! The instrument players were great, the soloists were great, the dancers were great, and the speakers—we were even able to hear all your words at the microphone. And so I had so many people come up to me at the end, telling me how great it all sounded, and for those of you that were here last year when we did "Whackadoo Zoo," so many people said "I couldn't believe how much those students have improved since last year." Last year "Whackadoo Zoo" was pretty good, but between Whackadoo Zoo and our second grade performance, they were so impressed with how much better you got with all of those things that we added to your performance! So everyone's proud of you!'* (fieldnotes, March 28, 2013)

In addition to hearing their opinions, another way in which Deena honors the ideas of her students is through validating their musical responses. An example of this happened in a second-grade class in which Deena was asking her students to move to the beat of a song:

After having the students try to find the microbeat of the new song, Deena asked them to pat and chant (with syllables) the microbeats and then the macrobeats while she sang. After this was done, Deena said to the students, 'This time you may either do the macrobeat or the microbeat, and I'm going to be looking around the room to see what you choose.' While the class was doing this, Avery started chanting divisions ('Du-ta-de-ta') instead, using the correct rhythm syllables. When the song was finished, Deena commented on what Avery had been doing, 'Even though that was not the direction, it does sound kind of cool,' and asked the rest of the class to try chanting 'Du-ta-de-ta' while she sang the song again. (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012)

While some teachers might have chosen to ignore Avery's musical response or even label it as "incorrect," Deena chose to acknowledge and validate his response by incorporating it into what the class was doing. In doing so, Deena communicated to Avery (as well as the rest of the students) that his musical ideas have value.

Allowing students to make decisions. The previous fieldnote excerpt also illustrates another specific way in which Deena empowers her students in the music classroom—by allowing them to make decisions. Deena frequently provides her students with opportunities to make choices, both for themselves and for the entire class. Making decisions is one way in which students can feel that they are making a contribution to the class, which Deena believes is important for their musical success: "I am always asking the students to contribute ideas in music class [in order to encourage their success], whether it is where to keep the beat, create a song

where they get to decide the tonality, [or] create a rhythm pattern” (email journal, November 10, 2012).

I observed countless opportunities for students to make decisions while in Deena’s classroom. In some classes Deena invited individual students to decide how the class would move to the beat during a song. In other classes Deena had individuals lead the rest of the students, such as a second-grade class in which the leader signaled to the class when they should switch between keeping macrobeats and microbeats during a song or a kindergarten class in which the leader held up signs telling the class whether to sing, clap, or audiate a song. At other times, Deena simply would ask an individual student to make a decision for the class, such as when she asked a student in a third-grade class, “Alex, should the boys sing the chord roots or the melody?” (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012). In all of these cases, Deena gave up her own power of making decisions and placed it in her students’ hands, thus helping them feel empowered to make musical decisions themselves and take control of their own music learning.

Special helper. Deena ensures that each of her students gets an opportunity to make musical decisions and feel empowered by having a “special helper” in each class for grades 1 through 4. Deena writes the name of all the students in each class on small cards and puts them in alphabetical order, and whomever’s name is on the card at the top of the pile gets to be the “special helper” for the class that day. Deena explained some of the duties of being the special helper:

Each student, when they are the helper, gets to close the door, take the ‘star sheet’ (to tell the teacher how [the class] did in following the rules), and be the first person to try something out such as instruments, game leaders, answering questions, turning off lights to see what is on the projector, etc. They also get to make choices—some examples

include what parts to sing (chord roots or melody, starting a round or ending the round, which song their group gets to sing in a partner song, etc.). (email journal, December 17, 2012)

Deena believes that giving every student a chance to be the special helper “is another way that I can make the students feel special” (email journal, December 17, 2012). Being the special helper “lets [each student] be the person who gets to make decisions, gets the chance to play instruments, or be a leader.” Deena says that the students “enjoy doing these special jobs, and they do them with pride and excitement” (email journal, December 17, 2012). “Even if they are small choices, [the students] feel important being able to make them, and it gives them some ownership of the class” (email journal, December 17, 2012).

Creating/composing. Another way in which Deena helps her students feel empowered in her classroom is by giving them opportunities to create their own music. Deena incorporates multiple composition projects throughout the year at various grade levels, starting with whole-class compositions when the students are in first-grade. Deena feels that creating their own music is crucial for students, because it shows them that “their ideas are important” (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena explains that, for many of her students, composition is one of their favorite musical activities “because their ideas mean something, because they’re contributing to it, and then they perform it or they demonstrate it for somebody, and it’s *theirs*. It really matters to them because it’s something *they* created” (interview, October 30, 2012). After helping a second-grade class compose a variation of the song “Ally Bally,” Deena asked them to raise their hands to indicate which version they liked better, and all but two students indicated that they preferred their version of the song, demonstrating the pride and excitement they took in creating their own music (fieldnotes, December 6, 2012).

The following is an example of a whole-class composition activity I observed in another second-grade class:

After reviewing a familiar chant that the students had learned in first grade, Deena explained to the class, 'Now instead of just speaking those words, we're going to do some composing, some music composition. Does anybody remember—what does it mean to compose music?' Deena called on Tatsuo, who enthusiastically replied, 'It means in a real orchestra if you perform that song, the man with the stick, with the baton, will wave it and then they'll know to start, and if there was no composer, then there won't be any music, and they won't know when to start.' Deena smiled and responded by saying, 'Tatsuo, you were so close! That is a good example of a conductor. And a composer is something a little bit different. Marina?' Marina answered, 'Someone like Beethoven.' Deena commented, 'Mmm-hmm, yeah, it's writing music. So today we are going to be composers. We are going to write a melody that goes along with "A Chubby Little Snowman."'

Deena continued, 'So before we compose, we're going to decide if we want our composition in major tonality or minor'. . . . After hearing Deena play chords on the piano in major and then minor, the students voted, and many cheered loudly when Deena declared minor tonality the winner.

'Now take a look at the first line of "A Chubby Little Snowman." Raise your hand if you have an idea of how to sing that first line. Let's start with Adam.' Instead of singing, Adam spoke the words in speaking voice, to which Deena responded by asking, 'So Adam, can you use your singing voice to sing how you want it to sound?' Adam softly sang the first line of the poem, and Deena played it back to him on the piano,

asking, 'Was that it?' After Adam confirmed that it was, Deena asked the class, 'Everyone, can you sing that?' Deena continued calling on individuals to sing a melody for each line of the chant and having the whole class try singing each part created. When James spoke his line, Deena asked him, 'Can you use your singing voice?' After James spoke his line in speaking voice again, Deena simply 'translated' what he did, basically taking any contour in his voice and putting it into the tonal context, acting as if that was what he had sung. After James, Aria created the next line, beaming with pride as she did so and then heard Deena acknowledge what she had created.

After all parts of the melody had been created, Deena led the class in singing through their entire composition. When the students finished singing, Deena exclaimed, 'I like it! Very nice, second-graders! So what we'll do with this song is I'll rewrite it into some music notes so you can take it home and you can sing it at home or play it at home or give it to somebody who can play it.' Several students excitedly look at one another while several others whisper 'Yes!' Deena continued, 'So you're going to getting a piece of paper pretty soon of the notes written down in musical notes with the words, so you can perform it at home.' Sal raised his hand and said, 'My sister and my mom can play the piano, but I don't know how.' Deena replied, 'Well, then you can give it to them, and maybe they can play and you can sing it!' (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012)

Sharing the music that they create and compose with others also contributes to students' sense of empowerment in Deena's classroom. According to Deena, composition is worth doing because she "[sees] the joy on [her students'] faces when they create something they are proud of" and "how excited they are to share what they've created with others." I observed the

students' excitement about sharing their composition in one second-grade class, during which the following took place:

After finishing singing through the class's variation on 'Ally Bally,' Deena said, 'Speaking of composing, now we're going to go back to "The Chubby Little Snowman" so we can show Mrs. Shouldice what we created because she didn't get to hear it yesterday when we created it.' Gage blurted out, 'Did you do the paper?' Deena answered, 'I haven't written it out yet for you, but I will do it very soon.' Gage continued, 'Did you do it [sing the composition] for the kindergarteners?' Deena replied, 'No, I haven't had them yet, but when I have them pretty soon, I'll do it.' Gage pressed her, saying, 'When is it? Tomorrow?' Another student joined in, exclaiming, 'Wait! You have Ms. Stone's class [today]!' Deena answered, 'I do, but we're not doing that chant today. We are doing it tomorrow, so I'll share it with them then.' Gabriel persisted, 'You also have Ms. Mann's class!' (fieldnotes, December 6, 2012)

Deena explains, "When my students share their [compositions] with others, their self-esteem grows. It even causes the students to have a greater respect for each other and it helps to strengthen the positive classroom environment I strive to have." Creating their own music and sharing it with others allows the students to take ownership of their music-making in Deena's classroom because, as Deena says, "It is where students can feel they own the music because they have created it" (composition article, obtained November 30, 2012).

Developing Musical Identity

Another reason Deena believes that composition is important for students is that it contributes to their sense of musical identity. Specifically, Deena wants her students to feel like

musicians, and she sees that composing is an activity that often leads her students to believe that they are musicians. Deena explained,

If we're doing something with composition... and [the students] hear [their composition] and they really like how it sounds, I feel like it does make them more confident, in that they feel like, 'Oh yeah, I really *am* a musician. I can create this, so I must be able to do this and this and this.' And I feel like a lot of times when we do the composition, all of a sudden they go home and they start writing things on their own or they start figuring things out that we've done in the classroom because they did get very excited and confident that they can do it. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Creating their own music helps Deena's students develop a musical identity that empowers them to want to learn and achieve more musically, both inside and outside of Deena's classroom. According to Deena,

I feel like it's the creation part that helps them develop their [musical] identity. Because there's no [one] right answer. There are so many *different* answers that they could give me. And when I ask them, more times than not they give me an answer that fits. . . . Once they start doing that, then they get to hear their product of what they created, and then they tend to be more excited about it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Deena believes that "the students' sense of pride in this final product makes them feel like real composers" (composition article, obtained November 30, 2012). Deena also explains,

"A lot of times that lightbulb goes on when we do composition. When we create a song, and then I play it back for them, and they think, 'Oh, that actually *does* sound good! I guess they hear that and they think, 'OK, I can do that on my own. I can create.' And I

feel like that's a lot of times when they decide that they are musicians." (interview, January 8, 2013)

Deena truly sees all of her students as musicians and conveys this belief to the students. Because data collection study did not involve interviews with the students or other interactions that might reveal their experiences and beliefs, I have no way of knowing whether the students did in fact view themselves as musicians. However, the pride they took in their work seems to suggest that this is the case. At one point I asked Deena if she believes that her students are "musicians," to which she responded, "*I think so! I mean, they don't always [think they are musicians]. They don't always realize it. And so I try to tell them*" (interview, January 8, 2013). Deena made a similar comment when discussing how she sensitizes students to their own learning needs in choosing parts of appropriate difficulty: "I try to make them understand that it's OK if they can't do the challenging parts. That doesn't mean that they're not a good musician" (interview, March 28, 2013).

Deena believes that helping all students to develop their musical identities and truly believe that they ARE musicians is the key to their musical success. In discussing why she believes this is so important, Deena explained,

I think that helps with their confidence level. When they *feel* like they're musicians, then all of a sudden the sky's the limit, and they'll try everything. And then they'll try to do more than maybe they're able to do, but it doesn't phase them. It's OK if they make a mistake. They'll just keep trying until they're able to get it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Summary

In order to help each student be successful musically, Deena believes she must first establish a positive classroom environment in which the musical potential of all students can be

nurtured. This positive environment Deena creates in her music classroom is one that helps students feel safe, supported, and empowered. Deena believes it is important to establish an environment in which students feel safe so that they have the freedom to explore and make mistakes without feeling afraid to fail or pressured to be perfect. Deena creates a supportive atmosphere in her classroom by developing positive teacher-student relationships, working to build students' musical confidence and self-esteem, and by encouraging positive interactions among her students. Finally, Deena tries to help students feel empowered in her classroom by inviting, acknowledging, and valuing student voice and contribution and helping her students to develop identities as musicians. When these three components—safety, support, and empowerment—are in place, Deena believes that students will be more able to achieve at their maximum musical potential and will experience greater success because they will feel cared for, respected, valued, and motivated.

CHAPTER 7: ENCOURAGING LIFELONG ENGAGEMENT WITH MUSIC

Because Deena believes that all of her students have musical potential, she believes that “all of them can have that love for music and can participate in music to the best of their ability” (interview, March 28, 2013). Therefore, Deena sees it as her duty to help each and every one of her students develop his or her musical skills and understanding. In doing so, Deena’s ultimate goal is to enable all of her students to continue on to a lifetime of musical engagement.

In discussing her philosophy for music education, Deena explained that her biggest hope for all of her students is that they continue to interact with music after they leave her classroom. “That could be anything from taking lessons on an instrument to singing in a choir to writing music to improvising. [I just hope they will do] *something* that relates to music, where they continue it on” (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena hopes that her students will be more prepared to engage with music in the future as a result of the diversity of musical experiences she provides for them in her classroom: “I want them to get as much as possible out of the experience here. . . . Just so they can learn as much as possible before they leave me and continue on” (interview, January 8, 2013). Deena explained, “I want to teach my students as much music—in as many forms—as possible in the time I have with them. . . . [so that they can] continue to participate in, create, and appreciate music when they are not in my classroom” (email journal, January 31, 2013).

Deena stresses that there are a multitude of possibilities for her students’ future musical engagement. This seems to stem from her belief that there are many ways in which people can be musical. Similar to her view that “to be musical there’re so many different things you can do,” Deena described the ways in which her students might interact with music after they leave her classroom by saying,

There're so many different ways that they could continue on with music. They could play an instrument. They could sing in choir. They could compose music. They could maybe start a band with some friends. Or even just going to different musical events and being able to understand the music that they're listening to. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Regardless of whether they choose to continue participating in school music classes, Deena hopes that all of her students will continue to engage with music in some way: "Their creativity can continue to grow and build, and they can continue to become better musicians, whether or not they participate in musical ensembles after they leave elementary school" (email journal, January 31, 2013).

During my time in Deena's classroom, I observed two main ways in which she encourages this lifelong musical engagement among her students. First, Deena helps her students to be musically independent, which enables them to engage with music after they leave her classroom. Second, Deena helps her students have positive and fulfilling musical experiences in her classroom, leading them to *want* to continue engaging with music after they leave her classroom.

Musical Independence

In order to equip her students to continue engaging with music in the future, Deena believes that she must help them develop musical independence. In describing her priorities for her program, Deena explained that she tries to help students "continue to participate in, create, and appreciate music when they are not in my classroom" because "it is my goal to help them become independent musicians" (email journal, January 31, 2013). For Deena, it is not enough to teach musical skills and knowledge to her students; she wants to ensure that they are able to utilize their musical skills and knowledge independently: "I will not always be there to 'help'

them with their musicianship. By developing musical independence, they can continue to participate in music on their own or in groups in middle school, high school, and beyond” (email journal, January 31, 2013). In fact, one of Deena’s favorite things about teaching elementary general music is when “they can go and do it [make music] on their own” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Not Performing with Students

One way in which Deena begins encouraging her students’ musical independence from an early age is by not always performing music *with* her students. During my time in Deena’s classroom, I observed her refraining from singing, chanting, or playing instruments with her students at some point in virtually every single class. Once the students could carry a musical part without her assistance, she stopped providing it and allowed them to make music without her help.

Deena believes that pushing her students to make music without her assistance is an important way in which she helps them to become musically independent. When I mentioned her tendency to avoid singing with students and asked why she chose to do this, Deena explained,

When I sing with my students for too long, they tend to use me as a crutch. They can be very good at split-second imitation, and if I am singing, they do not always learn the piece as well. When I stop singing, they are forced to do it on their own. (email journal, November 10, 2012)

At times the students struggle when “forced to do it on their own,” as when Deena reviewed a familiar chant with a kindergarten class only once and then invited them to say the entire chant without her. The kindergarteners had a hard time remembering all of the words and

rhythms; however, Deena did not jump in to assist them. She let them keep trying, and they were able to make it through the entire chant, albeit with a few mumbled patches (fieldnotes, December 6, 2012). However, because they had grown accustomed to making music without Deena's help, in most cases the students were able to carry on the music without her confidently, as when I heard the same kindergarten class accurately sing the song "Kookaburra" without Deena's assistance (fieldnotes, December 6, 2012). Performing music without having Deena as a "crutch" is a significant first step for her students in developing their musical independence. The following is an example of Deena's tendency to not perform music with her students:

Deena started singing 'Bow Belinda,' and the students quickly joined in as they entered the classroom. After the students were seated and settled on the blue carpet circle, Deena reviewed the chord roots to the song, singing on 'DO' and 'SO' and modeling on two boomwhackers. When she was done, Deena commented to the students, 'I wonder if you could sing it without me! Let's try!' After the students had finished singing the chord roots, Deena said, 'That was so good! But I bet I can trick you!' Then she invited the students to sing the chord roots again while she sang the melody. Cameron, a very tall African-American boy with glasses and a constant smile on his face, was the special helper that day, so Deena called him to play the chord roots on the boomwhackers while the class sang. 'So good, you guys didn't get tricked!' Next she had Zaryn and Piper play the chord roots while the class sang. Then Jakara, Reese, and George were called to play the boomwhackers, and after them were Emma, Blair, and Sam. Before starting this time Deena told the students, 'This time, first-graders, would you pick a part? Sing "Bow Belinda" if that's what you want OR sing the chord roots, the "DOs" and "SOs." Let's try it!' The class sang their parts so excitedly that it quickly turned into shouting.

Deena waited until they were finished before commenting, 'I think that was a tiny bit too loud. We're going to fix it!' After having the students with boomwhackers pass them on to three more students, Deena said to the class, "Nod your head if you remember how to sing in a light singing voice.... Pick a part and make sure it's nice and soft and in a regular light singing voice." After the students finished singing, Deena exclaimed, 'So much better!' (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012)

Multiple Parts Against the Teacher

After Deena's students can carry the music without her assistance, she helps them to take the next step toward musical independence: developing the ability to perform their part while she performs a different part. As the previous fieldnote excerpt illustrates, once Deena knows that her students can perform a song or chant without her, she pushes them even further by adding another musical part. Often she does this by singing, humming, or playing the "chord roots" (bassline) to the song that the students are singing. At other times she adds a rhythmic part, such as when she made a "ch" sound to the beat while her kindergarten students sang "Down by the Station" as they lined up at the door (fieldnotes, December 6, 2012).

Helping her students develop musical independence is not Deena's only goal in adding multiple parts. In addition to "[forcing the students] to do it on their own," Deena explains, If I am not singing [with the students], it gives me the opportunity to create a more musical environment by adding other parts such as chord roots, harmony parts, rhythm parts, etc. This helps them begin to understand the music on a higher level, as well as to 'bathe' them in more than just always the melody of a song. (email journal, November 10, 2012)

In doing this, Deena is able to accomplish two things at once: pushing her students to make music independently in two parts while also providing them with more complex and enriching musical experiences. Modeling these other musical parts and helping students “begin to understand the music on a higher level” not only develops their independence but also provides them with the readiness to perform these additional musical parts in the future.

Multiple Parts Among the Students

The next step Deena takes in developing her students’ musical independence is to push them to perform multiple parts among themselves. As illustrated in the previous fieldnote excerpt, once Deena knows her students can carry the song while she performs an additional part, she teaches them the additional part and invites them to perform the parts in multiple groups, eventually without her assistance.

Often these two parts consisted of the melody and chord roots/bassline to a song, as in the following example:

Deena started singing the song ‘Oh Sinner Man’ as the second-grade students came into the classroom, and they immediately joined her in singing. Once the students were seated, Deena reminded them, ‘Backs are straight!’ Then she asked them to remember ‘that other part [chord roots] we learned a long time ago.’ Deena got them started and then hummed the melody while the class sang the chord roots. Then she had them each choose the part they wanted to sing and listened as they sang (without singing with them). I was impressed that their singing was both in head voice AND in harmony! (fieldnotes, November 1, 2012)

At other times the multiple parts consisted of vocal ostinati to accompany a song, such as those that Deena taught the second-grade students as accompaniment to the song “The Ghost of John”

(see Figure 3 for song notation and Figure 4 for vocal ostinati). In this instance, Deena not only had her students perform multiple parts, but she also then gave them the choice of which of the three parts they each wanted to sing; this resulted in the various parts being interspersed around the room, which was more challenging and required more independence than if the students had been seated in three distinct groups according to part.

The Ghost of John

Traditional

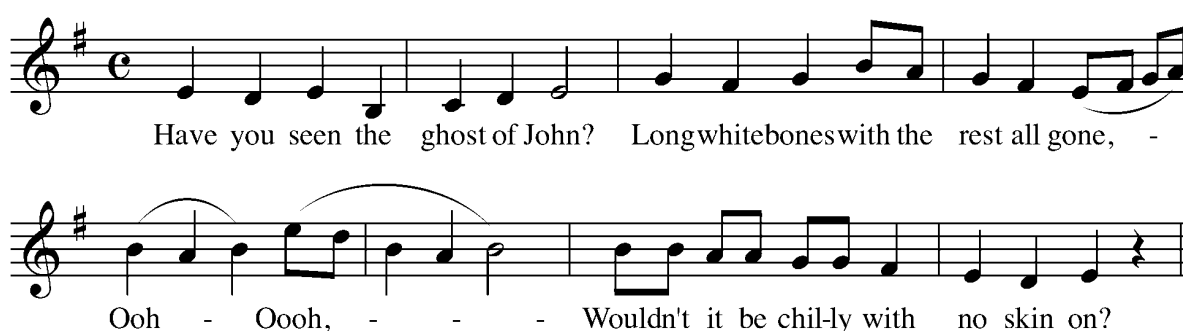
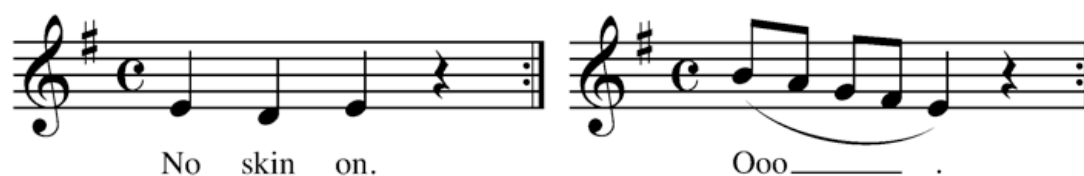


Figure 3. "The Ghost of John" song notation



Ostinati for "Ghost of John" from *Jump Right In: The Music Curriculum*, Book 3
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Figure 4. Vocal ostinati for "The Ghost of John"

Other opportunities for students to perform multiple parts among themselves focused solely on rhythm. One example of this was when Deena divided the class into two groups, one chanting the macrobeat and the other chanting the microbeat, and had the groups swap parts on her signal while she sang the song "Little Wind" (fieldnotes, December 13, 2012). At times the

additional part was as simple as singing the “resting tone” (“home tone” or tonic) to the beat while the rest of the class sang the song (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012).

Deena begins pushing the students to perform in multiple parts in simple ways like this early on, as early as when they are in kindergarten. One day after my participant-observation in Deena’s classroom was done, I received a text-message from her that contained a video of two kindergarten students performing a duet in class, with one little girl singing the song “Donkeys Love Carrots” while a little boy sang a simple tonic ostinato (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Simple tonic ostinato

Small Group Activities

The previous example illustrates another way in which Deena helps her students to become musically independent: by performing musical activities in small groups. Performing music or working on musical tasks in small groups allows (and even forces) the students to develop greater independence than performing as a whole class. For this reason, Deena frequently gives her students opportunities to work and/or perform in groupings that are much smaller than whole-class.

Deena believes that giving her students opportunities to work in small groups pushes them to take greater responsibility for and ownership of their music learning:

A lot of times the kids that are always volunteering [during whole-class activities] and are always getting the answers correct, then when we do group-work it’s like they take a step back because maybe it’s a little harder for them and they do’t want to get the answer

wrong. And so then it's [also] interesting to see which kids step up and which kids get it right away and which kids don't, and it's not always the same kids as when we're in a whole group together. So that's why I like doing the [small] group activities. (interview, November 13, 2012)

By having a chance to work in small groups, students who tend to be successful in whole-class activities can be pushed while students who typically struggle with whole-class activities may experience unexpected success in smaller groupings.

The following is an example of a small group activity that I observed in one of Deena's second-grade classes:

After Deena reviewed the 'One Bug, Two Bugs' chant with the class and had them echo several duple rhythms with syllables, she informed the students that they would be working in groups today. Each group would get an orange envelope, which contained eight pieces of paper. On each piece of paper was the notation for a two-beat rhythm pattern. Deena explained, 'You're going to figure out the whole "One Bug, Two Bugs" chant!' They would do this by figuring out the syllables for each part of the chant and then finding the notation that fit those syllables/that rhythm. While Deena was explaining, Avery was rolling around on the floor in his spot on the circle, softly chanting rhythms to himself. To help them understand and develop readiness for the task, Deena invited the class to figure out what the syllables would be for the part that goes 'One bug, two bugs' . . . Deena then told the students who would be in groups with whom. It looked like she was choosing the groups based on proximity (rather than ability, behavior, etc.).

The students gathered in their groups of three or four and excitedly pulled the papers out of their envelopes. I heard students shouting out different strategies. Braxton: 'OK, you say "Du-de Du-de!"' Someone else: 'Let's try saying [reading] them all.' In a group of four boys near the door, one boy took control: 'Someone say 'One bug two bugs' ... Ready? One, two, three!' While this boy said the words, the others chanted on rhythm syllables. I heard a curly-haired freckled girl in a group near the door exclaim, 'Hey, this is kind of like a puzzle!'

As the groups were working independently, Deena was circulating around the room, stopping at each group to see how they were doing or if they needed help. I walked around the room and noticed that a group comprised of Avery, a blond girl named Becki, and a girl with a ponytail named Ji-Yoon had all but the last two patterns correct. I crouched down to watch and listen and ask if they would show me what they came up with. They each started chanting through and pointing along to the notes as they went. However, when they got to the last two measures, they didn't notice that the notation they were pointing to didn't line up with the chant. A group near the piano consisting of Preston, another blond boy, and a girl with a blond ponytail also had all but the last two patterns correct. (fieldnotes, November 8, 2012)

Deena values these small-group activities not only because they push the students in terms of musical independence but also because they give her greater insight into her students' musical understanding and abilities than she typically might see or hear in a whole-class activity. In talking about the previous small-group rhythm activity, Deena remarked, "I'm always amazed as to what's coming out of their mouths and how much they're actually thinking and figuring it out!" (interview, November 13, 2012). She also noted that these small-group activities allow

students more time and freedom to figure things out than they typically are allowed in a whole-class activity. When I asked Deena to describe a student who recently had been particularly successful, she mentioned how Chris, a second-grade boy who frequently struggles with acting out in class, was able to be successful with a difficult activity in a small-group setting because “he was able to think without the stress of [the whole class] waiting for him” (email journal, November 21, 2012).

The following is another example of a small-group activity I observed in Deena’s classroom:

After the second-grade students sat down, Deena informed them that there would be no special helper that day ‘because today we’re going to play a game that we’ve never done before.’ She told them that they could decide whether they wanted to work alone, with a partner, or in a group of three or four. Deena gave them some pointers on forming groups nicely (which she later told me was in response to the previous day when some feelings were hurt in another class). ‘What could you do if someone wanted to join your group and...?’

After the students excitedly formed their groups, Deena told them they would need to be quiet so that the other groups couldn’t hear their answers. She called one student from each group to get a paper, pencil, and book to use as a hard surface. Then Deena played on the piano various songs that the students had learned to sing in music class but changed the tonality and meter of each song to see if the students could still recognize it, playing each song two times through. The first was ‘Land of the Silver Birch’ in major tonality and triple meter. The students listened intently and whispered feverishly with their group-members as they tried to figure out each song. The second song was ‘Tideo’

in minor tonality and triple meter. . . . Two different groups of boys were smiling, bouncing up and down, and shaking their fists in celebration of knowing the answer! Meanwhile, Anya and Ivy looked at them longingly, seeming confused. Some students began singing along after they had identified each song. . . . Songs 7, 8, and 9 ('Ghost of John' in major/triple, 'Ally Bally' in minor/triple, 'Winter Wonderland' in minor/triple) were particularly difficult for the students to figure out (and for me!).

After they had heard all of the songs, Deena asked a student for the answer to each song, inviting the class to try singing each in the altered tonality and/or meter. For example, she asked Samir for the answer to Song 1 and then said, 'Now let's all try singing "Land of the Silver Birch" in major and triple!'" (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012)

Doing work at centers is another example of a small-group activity that Deena uses in her classroom. Unfortunately, I was home sick on the day her second-grade classes had participated in centers, but Deena later described it for me:

They really enjoyed it! We had one center with different puppets, where they created patterns back and forth. There was a center where they got to write patterns on whiteboards. There was a center where they got to read music books. One of the centers was playing the Q-chord with me. And then [at] another one, I gave them a bunch of patterns that they could string together and create. . . . I chose where I wanted them to start in different groups [of three or four], and then they rotated so they all had the chance to be at every single center. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Deena noted that having her students do center work in these small groups allowed her to observe who was successful and who was struggling with various tasks. When I asked her to describe any student(s) who had been particularly successful or struggling, she said,

Chris, Gage, and Sergio have started to really get excited about rhythm patterns. This week when we did centers, they had a great time writing their own patterns and reading them to each other. Allowing them the chance to be creative with patterns lately, I feel has really allowed them to “bloom” and they continue to try to learn harder ones, are constantly thinking about them, asking me questions such as ‘How would you write this pattern?’ or ‘What does this pattern say?’ (email journal, December 17, 2012)

By offering her students greater musical independence, this small group work also helps motivate Deena’s students to want to continue learning and doing more on their own.

Individual Response

Probably the most important way in which Deena helps develop her students’ musical independence is by eliciting individual responses in her classroom. As previously described in Chapter Six, Deena provides her students with frequent opportunities to respond individually in a variety of skills. By having these frequent chances to sing, chant, and play instruments in solo, Deena’s students are required to be independent and thus are able to take individual responsibility of their music making. Deena believes this helps them to be successful at music because “having the opportunity for them to take turns on things and for them to do things individually helps them ‘own’ the music and learn it more, rather than if it was just all as a [whole] group” (interview, March 28, 2013). Deena also believes that this is the reason why her students succeed at the level they do. When I asked Deena how it is that almost all of her students in the upper grades can sing accurately, she responded,

I do a lot--a *lot*--of having them sing alone, and so maybe that's it. Because it's consistent I feel like year to year, where by the time they get to fifth grade, almost all of them are in singing voice. (interview, January 8, 2013).

One way in which Deena believes individual response helps her students to become musically independent is that it allows them to hear themselves and gauge their own progress. In describing why she gives her students many opportunities to respond alone, Deena explained, "Musically, I feel like when they're singing or playing or responding by themselves, then they can hear it in their minds, and they can make the connections if it was correct or if it was incorrect" (interview, October 30, 2012). When I asked Deena how many second-grade students are not using their singing voices, she responded, "Normally if I have them from kindergarten and first [grade], it's usually just three or four or so. Because we do so many activities where they're singing alone that I feel like they usually can figure it out" (interview, October 30, 2012). I observed Deena's students playing solo singing games on numerous occasions and noted that, on average, all but one or two students in each fifth-grade class were using their singing voices (fieldnotes, November 1, 2012; December 13, 2012).

In addition to individual response helping the students figure out for themselves how to sing, Deena feels that having a chance to hear their classmates performing alone helps her students learn because "they can hear others doing it and have models [in] what the other students do" (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena pondered this when I asked her what may have helped a particular student, who previously had been struggling, learn how to sing accurately:

Possibly just hearing what's going on in class, hearing the other kids match pitch, being able to practice on his own a lot. I think he was able to hear himself and hear where he

wasn't quite there, hear how the other kids are doing it, and I think he was able to figure it out based on the various activities we were doing singing alone. (interview, November 15, 2012)

Because she provides her students with so many opportunities to respond alone, Deena believes it is only a matter of time before they develop their musical abilities and eventually the independence to make music alone.

Deena also noted that, because she begins having students respond individually and develop musical independence as soon as possible, her students come to see this as a normal part of what they do in music class. She explained, “They do a lot of singing/chanting/creating/etc. alone and in small groups from the beginning [preschool or kindergarten]. It is just ‘something we do’ in music class” (email journal, November 10, 2012). “It’s not a big deal for them to do it [make music] by themselves. It’s just sort of what they’re used to” (interview, October 30, 2012). Because they start making music in solo and developing independence right away, this becomes the “norm” in Deena’s classroom:

When the kids come in here, it’s just an expectation that they’re going to be singing alone, and so they just accept it because we start when they’re really young; whereas if it’s not necessarily the expectation, and then you give them something to do, they may have some different reaction to it. They may not want to try it. They may not want to do it because it’s not what they’re used to or what they’re comfortable with. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Because Deena incorporates individual response right away rather than waiting until students get into the upper elementary grades, “it isn’t a big deal [to respond alone] when they are older” (email journal, November 10, 2012).

Deena also believes that assessing these individual responses is important because this allows her to gauge the extent to which students are independently mastering various musical skills. When I asked Deena if she believed assessing students' musical progress is important, she replied, "I do. And I think it's *really* important!" (interview, January 8, 2013). She went on to explain,

I feel like [if I'm not assessing individual response] they just sort of get lost in the mix, and then they never really necessarily learn to sing. I mean, some kids do. But then there are some that *could* have learned to sing, but because they were never challenged to or they were never really taught [to sing alone/independently], then they just sort of float along in the middle. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Deena believes that performing only with others does not push students to be musically independent. She happened to mention to me that one of the other elementary music teachers in the Forestview district had been surprised to learn that Deena assesses her students' singing abilities. Deena recalled that this colleague commented, "I never assess that! Why would I assess singing voice?" (fieldnotes, October 30, 2012). In a later conversation with Deena about assessment, I asked her why she thought her colleague felt that way, and she surmised,

I feel like she might be one of those teachers that just teaches a song, and then [the students] learn it, and then they all sing it together. But at that point I don't know if they've really learned it if she's not assessing or if she's not helping them with their singing voices [individually]. I feel like at that point some kids may not know [how to independently sing] it, but she wouldn't ever know because a lot of kids can imitate, like second-after imitation. And you'd never really know [that they can't sing independently]

because she's just hearing the whole group and not the individual. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Deena believes that hearing and assessing her students' individual responses enables her to gauge where her students are in the process of developing their independent musical skills.

Student Engagement

While Deena believes that helping her students develop musical independence will enable them to participate in music after they leave her classroom, this is not enough. Deena also believes that, in order to increase the likelihood that her students actually will continue to engage with music outside of her classroom, she needs to help them *want* to engage with music. The importance of providing her students with a positive experience in her classroom came across when Deena described what she wanted students to get out of her program: "I want them to have such a great experience [in my classroom] that they want to continue on with [music] in some form once they leave here" (interview, October 30, 2012). This is why Deena tries to provide her students with positive experiences in her classroom in which each student will find a musical activity he or she enjoys and feels motivated to pursue both now and later in life.

Student Enjoyment

For Deena, helping her students to want to continue engaging with music in the future starts with helping them all to enjoy music class. Deena believes that if students enjoy interacting with and making music in her music classes, they will be more likely to want to continue doing so. During my time in Deena's classroom, I observed countless examples of students' enjoyment in making music in that setting. One sign of the students' enjoyment was that they rarely had to be asked to participate; more often than not, as soon as Deena began singing a song or moving to the music, most students immediately joined in, which I took as an

indication that they *wanted* to and enjoyed doing so. Another sign of student enjoyment that I observed was in the form of student requests to do (or continue doing) particular activities, such as the following from a second-grade class:

Next they reviewed a new song they had started learning in the previous class ('Deinonychus'). The students seemed to enjoy singing this song, as evidenced by their smiles, bright eyes, enthusiastic movement, and energetic singing. When it was over, Samantha whispered, 'Can we do it again?' Then I heard her softly (and accurately!) singing the song to herself as Deena began moving on to the next activity. (fieldnotes, January 8, 2013)

A simpler and even more frequent sign of student enjoyment in Deena's classroom were cheers of "Yes!" after Deena announced that they would be doing particular musical activities. Because the students enjoy doing these activities, Deena believes they will be more likely to want to continue interacting with music in the future.

Not only does Deena believe that musical enjoyment increases the likelihood that a student will continue engaging with music, but she also believes that musical enjoyment helps students persevere when they are faced with challenges: "They're more willing to do the activities because it's just this common thing where they're in class, they're enjoying it, everybody's enjoying it, and so they just... They have fun, and so they're ready to just give whatever!" (interview, December 4, 2012). This is why Deena tries to plan a variety of activities among which each child can find something he or she enjoys: "Doing an activity that a child likes helps them develop an excitement that carries through the other activities that maybe they are not as good at, or isn't their favorite" (email journal, January 31, 2013).

By providing her students with a rich variety of musical experiences, Deena hopes that each student will find some way of engaging with music that he or she enjoys and would like to continue in the future:

I try to give them that complete music experience so that they can pick their favorites [musical activities] and what it is that they think they're good at or what it is that they enjoy and what it is that they want to continue on with later on. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Student Motivation

In addition to helping her students find enjoyment in music, Deena also tries to help her students find fulfillment in developing their musical skills and understanding so that they will want to continue learning and doing more with music in the future. In describing what she wanted students to get out of her music program, Deena said, “[I want them to leave with] the drive to learn more” (interview, October 30, 2012). Deena believes that helping her students develop their motivation for music will provide an impetus for their future engagement with music.

One way in which Deena develops her students' motivation for music is by giving them choices. In addition to helping students perform parts of appropriate difficulty (see Chapter Five) and helping students feel empowered (see Chapter Six), providing students with choices also makes them more invested in their own music making and music learning. Deena explained,

I like to give students a choice, because I feel that it makes them more excited to do the activity. When they are given a choice, they tend to perform it better because they were the ones that made the decision. (email journal, November 10, 2012)

By providing her students with choices, such as what part to perform, how to participate, or whether they want to work alone or with others, Deena also sends her students the message that they are capable, which in turn enhances their motivation. Knowing that Deena believes they are capable music-makers helps her students see *themselves* as capable music-makers, thus increasing their musical self-efficacy. Deena explained that, when students feel successful and capable, “then they feel good about themselves, too. . . . A lot of times that will give them the self-confidence, that ‘OK, I *can* do well. I *am* doing a good job. This was fun. I enjoy this’” (interview, November 13, 2012). Similarly, when students “create a song and then I play it back for them, they think, ‘Oh, that actually *does* sound good!’ I guess they hear that and they think, ‘OK, I can do that on my own. I can create’” (interview, January 8, 2013). By helping her students realize that they are capable music-makers, Deena helps increase their motivation for engaging with music in the future. As mentioned in Chapters Four and Six, helping students see themselves as capable musicians is a key way in which Deena helps increase their musical motivation:

When they *feel* like they’re musicians, then all of a sudden the sky’s the limit, and then they’ll try everything. And then they’ll try to do more than maybe they’re able to do [currently], but it doesn’t phase them. . . . They’ll just keep trying until they’re able to get it. (interview, March 28, 2013)

Because Deena helps her students to see themselves as capable musicians, they embrace new and challenging interactions with music. An example of this was the previous fieldnote excerpt in which Deena changed the tonality and meter of familiar songs to see if the second-grade students could recognize them; some of these were even difficult for me to figure out, but the students were excited by the challenge of this activity (fieldnotes, December 19, 2012).

Deena believes that, when students feel capable, they are motivated rather than intimidated by new challenges. Deena explained, “Because they’re enjoying it and it’s something they can’t do [yet], they *want* to be able to do it” (interview, January 8, 2013). In discussing composition in her classroom, Deena stated, “My students are excited to compose because they are able to use their creativity and be challenged in ways that many of them have not been challenged before” (composition article, obtained November 30, 2012). Deena also mentioned a previous lack of being challenged as a possible reason why new students may take time to “buy in” to her music class: “Maybe they didn’t like going there [music class at their previous school]. Maybe their [previous music] teacher didn’t challenge them” (interview, March 28, 2013).

Deena believes that providing her students with musical challenges and helping them feel capable to take on these challenges enhances their motivation to engage with music:

When it is something that they can’t do, a lot of the kids *are* really motivated to figure it out. They’re like, ‘It’s a challenge’ for them, and they’re really excited to try to get it, and a lot of times they will. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Furthermore, Deena taps into this motivation in order to push her students to learn and do more:

If a student is always able to figure [things out], I would try to give the student an extremely difficult [task] that I haven’t taught them yet to see if he/she can figure it out. I enjoy watching the face on that student when they get the answer wrong, and then continue to think and think about what the answer is. Quite frequently by the next day, they will have figured it out. This helps keep them engaged. (email journal, January 31, 2013)

Musical Engagement Outside of Class

In helping her students to enjoy music and see themselves as capable musicians, Deena also helps them want to continue making music on their own and to believe that they are capable of doing so. The result is that many students are motivated to engage with and make music outside of Deena's classroom, as the previous quote suggests. Deena explained that this is often why she presents her students with challenges in class:

I want to give them a challenge where they might not get it, and then they might be a little frustrated about it, and they'll think about it. And I'll usually come back to it at some point, and almost always a lot of them are successful that second time. Maybe the first time it crashed and burned, but they've been thinking about it. And so the music is still happening outside of the classroom. (interview, January 8, 2013)

Similarly, Deena noted that many of her fourth-grade students are motivated to play their recorders and teach themselves new songs outside of class: "A lot of times the kids will figure [songs] out on their own before we get to it in class" (interview, December 4, 2012). Deena described to me one example of this motivation:

Our middle section of 'Star Wars,' I don't teach the fourth-graders how to play it, but I give them the notes, and if they can figure out how to do it before the performance, they can play it at the performance. And so I have one class that like half the class has figured out how to do it. . . . I had a girl come in [from another class], and she says, 'I kept working on it, and I kept working on it, and yesterday I finally played it! So I'm ready to do it during the performance!' (interview, March 28, 2013)

During my time in Deena's classroom, I personally observed several instances in which students mentioned their continued engagement with music outside of school. Hannah, a spunky

second-grade girl, raised her hand during class one day to tell Deena, “Last night I sang the whole ‘Albuquerque Turkey’ song in the bathtub!” (fieldnotes, November 13, 2012). On another day I overheard Javon, a fifth-grade boy, comment about a certain singing warm-up, “I’ve been practicing this because I’m not very good at it!” (fieldnotes, December 4, 2012).

As previously described in Chapter Six, Deena believes that composing is an activity that is extremely motivating for her students because when they compose, “their ideas are important” and the music “is *theirs*.” Deena notes that after composing in her classroom, many of her students are motivated to continue composing their own music outside of her classroom:

All of a sudden they go home and they start writing things on their own or they start figuring things out that we’ve done in the classroom because they did get very excited and confident that they can do it. (interview, October 30, 2012)

Deena laughed when recalling a particular fourth-grade student: “He’s come and brought me music that he’s written [at home] and has told me that I could use those as [recorder karate] belt songs if I would like!” (interview, October 30, 2012).

Not only do many of Deena’s students continue making music outside of school, but they also share their musical skills and understanding with others. Deena commented that some of her students sing songs from her classroom at home with their siblings: “Many of my students with older siblings already come to music class knowing some of the repertoire because their brothers or sisters teach them” (email journal, December 17, 2012). Deena also told me about an instance in which one of her second-grade students had shared his understanding of music with his parent at home:

I had a parent yesterday at the performance, she said her son started taking violin lessons, and she was playing some song, and he looked at her and said, ‘Mom, that’s in minor.’

And she went--Or no! He was playing it or he was singing it, and he said it. And so she said, 'I had to go to the book and look [at the key signature], and then I saw, 'Oh yeah, it is in minor!' And I couldn't figure out how he knew that! And then tonight I figured it out!' Because we talked about the difference in the performance! [laughs] (interview, March 28, 2013)

Deena's students even make music with each other outside of school. I recorded the following conversation in my fieldnotes:

Deena and I were chatting between classes about Jaedyn and Jarrod, the two 'beat-boxing boys' I had remembered from when I observed last year. Deena mentioned that Jarrod does really well in music class and that it's 'a happy place for him' because he does well. She mentioned that several students live in his same government housing and they get together and play songs sometimes. (fieldnotes, November 13, 2012)

For James and other students like him, Deena's music classroom is "a happy place" because in it they are able to feel successful in developing their musical abilities and empowered and motivated to make music, thus they continue to do so on their own.

Summary

Because Deena believes "[her] students ALL have a *lot* of music potential" (March 28, 2013), she strives to provide her them with positive classroom experiences that not only will help them develop the musical skills and understanding to make and interact with music independently but also will motivate them to actually *want* to make and interact with music independently. In doing so, Deena hopes to fulfill her larger goal of helping each of her students tap into his or her fullest musical potential and go on to a lifetime of participation and engagement with music. I read aloud to Deena some statements from adults who felt that their

negative experiences in school music classes had caused them to stop making music (Burnard, 2003), and the following was her response:

I feel like it's those stories that make me try to make sure that everybody has a positive experience in here. Whenever I tell somebody that I'm a music teacher, they always have a story. 'Oh, well, when *I* was in music class, this and this and this.' And sometimes it's positive, and sometimes it's negative, but I feel like they *really* remember their experiences in music class. And so I want to make that a positive experience. I don't want anybody to quit music because of something that I said. I want them to be able to enjoy it and to continue on *because* it was such a good experience. (interview, January 8, 2013)

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary of the Study

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to explore one elementary music teacher's beliefs about the nature of musical ability and the ways in which these beliefs relate to actions and lived experiences in the classroom. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What is the nature and extent of the beliefs about students' musical abilities and capabilities held by one elementary music teacher who believes all students have the capacity to be musical?
2. How do beliefs about musical abilities manifest themselves in this teacher's actions and decision-making in the classroom?
3. How do beliefs about musical abilities manifest themselves in this teacher's interactions with students and, more broadly, in the classroom culture she creates?
4. What is the relationship between this teacher's beliefs about musical ability and her beliefs about the purpose of music education, specifically of elementary general music?

Methodology

This investigation was a case study of one elementary general music teacher, Deena Ridge, purposely selected using intensity sampling. I collected data using ethnographic techniques for over two months. Multiple sources of data included extensive classroom observations documented through fieldnotes and video footage, audio-recorded semi-structured interviews, teacher journal entries, teaching artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, assessment tools), and researcher memos.

Trustworthiness was enhanced through prolonged engagement in the field, collection of multiple data sources, participant member checks, and peer review of analysis. I analyzed the data first through open coding and then used axial coding to group the codes into related categories. Through my analysis, I identified four emergent themes.

Overview of Findings

The first theme focuses on Deena's beliefs about musical ability, specifically her belief that all students have musical ability. The second theme pertains to Deena's treatment of students as individuals in order to help each succeed. The third theme highlights the importance of creating a positive learning environment that nurtures each student's potential. The fourth theme focuses on Deena's goal of enabling and encouraging lifelong musical engagement among her students.

Beliefs about musical ability. Deena believes that every one of her students has the potential to develop musical skills and understanding; therefore, she expects that all students will develop some level of musical competence in her classroom. Deena defines musical ability as that which a person currently is able to do musically, which she views as malleable and different from one's potential to achieve in music.

While Deena acknowledges that students have varying levels of musical ability and that some may learn music more quickly and/or easily than others, she believes that musical ability is a product of one's previous experience with music, practice, effort, and confidence/self-esteem and that all students can learn and improve their musical skills over time. Deena also believes that there are different ways of being musical and that students have different musical strengths.

Treating students as individuals. Although Deena expects that each of her students will develop some level of musical competence, she does not expect them all to do so at the same

rate. Deena acknowledges that all of her students have unique backgrounds, experiences, abilities, strengths, and interests. For this reason, she believes that each student needs something different from her as the music teacher in order to help him or her continue to grow and progress in his or her musical development.

In order to help each student reach some form of musical success in her classroom, Deena provides all students with differentiated learning experiences at varying levels of difficulty according to student needs. I observed three ways in which Deena helps all students achieve success through incorporating varying degrees of difficulty: (1) by including multiple activities of varying difficulty levels within a single class period, (2) by individualizing instruction within an activity by adapting content difficulty for each student, and (3) by providing multiple parts of varying difficulty within an activity.

Because Deena believes that people can be musical in different ways and thus have different musical strengths, another way in which she helps all students experience some form of musical success in her classroom is by including a variety of musical activities in each class period. By including a variety of activities and allowing her students some choice in how they will participate musically, Deena hopes that all students will be able to tap into their unique musical strengths and interests and feel good about themselves, which she believes can carry over into other activities.

In order for Deena to be able to differentiate instruction for her students and provide them with various activities that will tap into their strengths and interests, she must know each and every one of her students. Deena is sensitive and responsive to all of her students' individual needs, interests, and engagement in class. She also provides many opportunities for individual student response, which allows her to assess student progress and diagnose individual learning

needs. Although Deena hears each of her students perform individually on a regular basis and thus has a good sense of what each student can do, she leaves herself open to surprise because she does not limit what her students are able to achieve based on what she expects they can do. By being sensitive to each student's individual needs and not making assumptions that may limit his or her achievement, Deena tries to help each student reach his or her fullest musical potential.

The power of the learning environment. Deena believes that all of her students have musical potential and can develop the ability to make and understand music but that, in order for this to happen, students must be nurtured in a positive learning environment. This positive atmosphere is one in which students feel safe, supported, and empowered. When these three components are in place, the result is an environment in which maximum learning can occur because students feel cared for, respected, valued, and motivated, in turn leading to greater student success.

Before students can excel musically, Deena believes they must feel safe in the learning environment. For this reason, she cultivates an atmosphere of respect in her classroom so that students feel comfortable rather than threatened. Deena also provides students with a sense of safety in her classroom by giving them permission to make mistakes. By normalizing mistakes and even modeling them herself, Deena hopes to help students focus on the process of learning and the progress they are making rather than on perfection.

In addition to feeling safe in their learning environment, Deena believes that students must also feel supported. Because she believes that confidence and self-esteem are necessary in order to develop one's musical ability to the maximum extent possible, Deena strives to create a classroom environment in which each student develops this sense of musical confidence and self-esteem. One way in which Deena does this is by working to establish positive relationships

with her students so “they feel like they matter.” Deena also builds her students’ musical confidence and self-esteem by calling attention to their strengths and communicating her persistence and confidence that they will all succeed. Additionally, she encourages positive interactions among her students so that they are helpful to one another and celebrate one another’s successes.

In addition to a learning environment in which students feel safe and supported, Deena believes that students also must feel musically empowered in order for them to achieve maximum musical success. This sense of empowerment allows students to take full ownership of their music learning by helping them feel that they ARE musicians. One way in which Deena encourages musical empowerment among her students is by allowing them to have a voice in and make a contribution to what goes on in the music classroom. This includes the honoring of students’ ideas and opinions, enabling student decision-making, giving each student the opportunity to be a “special helper,” and providing experiences in which students create and compose their own music. Deena also encourages musical empowerment among her students by helping them develop their musical identities. According to Deena, when students feel like they are musicians, they are more motivated to engage in musical activities and will be more likely to persist when faced with challenges because they believe they are capable.

Encouraging lifelong engagement with music. Deena believes that all of her students have musical potential and can develop musical skills and understanding. Therefore, she sees it as her duty to help each and every one of her students develop some level of musical competence. In doing so, Deena’s ultimate goal is to enable all of her students to continue on to a lifetime of musical engagement. She encourages this lifelong musical engagement by helping her students become musically independent and by providing them with positive and fulfilling

musical experiences that will lead them to *want* to continue engaging with music after they leave her classroom.

In order to equip her students to continue engaging with music in the future, Deena believes that she must help them develop musical independence. One way in which Deena begins encouraging this musical independence is by not always performing music with her students so that “they are forced to do it on their own.” Next she pushes students’ musical independence by adding an additional musical part to the one they are performing and then by having the students perform multiple parts simultaneously. Opportunities to work in small groups and to respond individually also push students to become musically independent.

In addition to helping her students to become competent and independent musicians, Deena also works to increase her students’ level of musical engagement so that they will want to continue making participating in musical activities in the future. One way in which Deena does so is by helping all of her students to enjoy music and her class. Deena believes that if students enjoy interacting with and making music in her classroom, they will be more likely to want to continue doing so outside of the classroom. Deena also provides opportunities for her students to make decisions (such as what part to perform, how to participate, or whether they want to work alone or with others) and tries to communicate to them that they are musically capable, both of which she believes will enhance their motivation to engage with music. In helping her students to enjoy music and see themselves as capable musicians, Deena also helps them want to continue making music on their own and to believe that they are capable of doing so, leading many students to engage with and make music outside of her classroom.

Implications for Practice

This qualitative case study of Deena Ridge revealed connections between her beliefs about musical ability and her teaching practice in the elementary general music classroom. While it is difficult to draw direct causal links between beliefs and practice, it appears that they are interrelated in a complex variety of ways. Although it would be inappropriate to generalize the findings of this study to all music teaching and learning settings, some of the implications of these findings may be transferable to similar settings or provide “food for thought” for others in the field of music education.

Defining Musical Talent and Other Terms

Much of the debate regarding the existence and impact of musical talent seems to be rooted in ambiguity among persons’ use of the term “talent.” For some, talent is defined as an innate gift, a special, fixed capacity that is present at birth in only a select subset of the population; however, others define talent as acquired expertise that can be developed in any among the general population “[depending] on external support and hard work” (Scripp, Ulibarri, & Flax, 2013, p. 60). Deena conceptualizes musical talent as acquired expertise or learned skill, as implied by her statements that students “can become more talented than before” as they gain experience with music and that putting forth effort can lead them to “possessing that musical talent that they may not have had before.”

The way in which a person conceptualizes and uses this term likely influences their actions in the music classroom. A teacher who believes that talent is an innate gift that is present in a minority of students may be less likely to believe that musical competence can be developed among the majority and thus less likely to expect that all students will develop musical skills. However, a teacher like Deena, who believes that talent involves the acquiring of musical

expertise and skills by anyone, may be more likely to commit to and persist in helping all students to do so. Music educators should be aware of the ways in which they use the word “talent” and how this may relate to and/or influence their teaching, as well as how they communicate its meaning to students and parents.

Another point of confusion involves the use of terms such as musical ability, musical achievement, musical potential, and music aptitude. “There are no universally agreed definitions of these terms” (Hallam, 2006, p. 93), and they often are used in varying and even overlapping ways. Deena conceptualizes musical ability as “what a child is [currently] able to do musically” and believes that “musical ability can get better with practice.” In contrast to Deena’s use of the term musical ability is her use of the term musical potential, which she sees as that which a person might be able to do at some point in the future; Deena believes that her “students ALL have a *lot* of music potential” and that their levels of musical ability or achievement depend on the extent to which they “tap into” that potential through experience, effort, and practice.

Regardless of the terms used, it is important that music educators realize that a student’s current level of demonstrated musical skill and knowledge may not be indicative of his or her potential for future progress and that the fact that some may show high levels of current ability does not necessarily imply an innate “gift.” Scripp et al. (2013) suggest that music teachers “must remember that the ‘advanced’ students are not necessarily more ‘innately endowed’ than the rest of the class but more likely have benefited from a variety of advantages—be they more engaged parents; a head start on music acquisition; or the previous development of related academic, cognitive, or social skills” (p. 98). This is similar to Deena’s explanation that differences in students’ abilities may be related to the fact that some have “had other musical experiences when they come [to her]” while “with others they come into the music room, and

they've never had any of that.” Deena believes that some students may seem to have a “natural ability,” for whom music “comes very easily,” yet she acknowledges that for other students “it just takes a bit to get there.” Rather than conceptualizing this “natural ability” as the deciding factor in determining musical “haves” and “have-nots,” Deena views it as simply a matter of the speed and ease with which a child will achieve. Just because a child struggles does not mean they are “unmusical” and/or will never develop musical competence. Instead of using the idea of innate, special talent to account for the differences between the high achievement of some and the lower achievement of others, music educators should acknowledge and value the skill that can come through time, experience, effort, practice, and instruction.

Attributions for Musical Success or Failure

Rather than attributing musical success or failure to the idea of innate and fixed talent, Deena believes that the development of musical ability is the result of a complex variety of factors, including prior experience with and instruction in music, practice over time, effort, and confidence. In particular, Deena believes that effort plays a vital role in students’ musical achievement and continually stresses the importance of effort in her classroom, as when she assured a struggling student, “Later it will be much easier, but it will take a lot of practice.”

The attribution theory of motivation posits that the causes to which we attribute success or failure at a particular task will influence our motivation for that task (Asmus, 1994; Austin et al., 2006; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2011; Maehr et al., 2002; Smith, 2011). For example, if a person attributes musical failure to the internal, stable attribute of ability, he may be less inclined to engage in music because he does not believe he has the capability to improve. However, if he attributes musical failure to the internal, unstable attribute of effort, he may be more likely to persist, believing that increased effort can lead to increased performance. The findings of several

studies of students' attributions for musical success or failure suggest that many students believe that fixed ability is the most important factor and that this belief may strengthen as students get older (Asmus, 1986; Legette, 1998). Asmus observed more specifically a "shift in [students'] internal attributions from unstable, effort related, to stable, ability related causes" (p. 271).

The fact that many children stop attributing musical success or failure to unstable elements (such as effort) and start attributing it to stable elements (such as ability) suggests that their musical motivation may decrease because they stop believing that they have the capability to improve their musical skills. Asmus (1986) speculates that this shift from effort to ability in students' attributions for musical success or failure "may be a function of learning both in the music class and in life" (p. 271). For this reason, it is vitally important for music educators to send the message to students as early as possible that all of them have musical potential and that their level of effort will have an impact on their achievement.

It is also important that music educators examine their own attribution beliefs about musical success or failure and the ways in which these beliefs may influence their interactions with students. In studies of the musical attribution beliefs of pre-service and in-service teachers, Legette (2002, 2012) found that, on average, participants ranked effort only slightly more important than musical ability. Because of the close link between beliefs and actions, it is likely that these attribution beliefs are related to the ways in which these teachers interact with their students. More specifically, "the attributions that teachers make to their pupils who are doing poorly may reflect their beliefs but also hinder their effective interventions with pupils" (Raths, 2001, p. 2). When discussing students who were struggling, Deena almost always attributed their current lack of musical achievement to a lack of prior musical experiences or a need for more practice or instruction. She also frequently communicated these beliefs to her students, as

when I observed her telling a struggling student, “We’ll get there. It’s going to get easier and easier as we practice.” Music educators should be conscious of the language they use with their students and the ways in which it can communicate strong messages in subtle ways.

Beliefs About Musical Ability: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy?

Deena believes that all of her students have musical potential and thus expects that all of them will develop some form of musical ability. While they all may not achieve at the same level or at the same pace, Deena expects that every student will learn all of the concepts and skills that she teaches them on some level and will develop some degree of musical competence. This is similar to the findings of ethnomusicological studies of cultures in which there is no concept of selective talent and it is believed that all can develop musical skills (Blacking, 1967, 1971, 1973, 1987; Feld, 1984, 1990; Koops, 2010; Mapana, 2011; Marshall, 1977, 1982; Merriam, 1964, 1967; Messenger, 1958, 1971; Russell, 1997; Turino, 1989). Specifically, Deena seems to hold for her students an “expectation to be musical” similar to that found by Koops (2010) among people in The Gambia. On numerous occasions Deena compared music to mathematics, stating that, just as students may need to put forth varying degrees of effort but all can develop some level of mathematical competence, all students can develop some degree of musical skills but may require varying amounts of time and effort to do so. Deena seems to believe in and expect the idea of “average musical ability” described by Blacking (1971):

If average linguistic ability is taken to refer to the fact that almost every member of every known human society is able to communicate with other men in at least one language, average musical ability should refer to a similarly universal ability to communicate in music. (p. 22)

Numerous researchers and scholars have suggested that teachers' beliefs about their students' abilities may act as "self-fulfilling prophecies" (Brändström, 1999; Pajares, 1992; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Scripp et al., 2013; Sloboda, 2005; Sloboda et al., 1994; Wigfield & Harold, 1992). According to Pajares (1992), "beliefs influence perceptions that influence behaviors that are consistent with, and that reinforce, the original beliefs" (p. 317). Put more simply by Sloboda (2005),

Teachers' beliefs about their students [sic] abilities affect their behaviour towards those children. When a teacher believes a child has high potential, the teacher is more likely to set the child challenging tasks, and encourage him/her to succeed. When a teacher believes a child has low potential, the teacher is more likely to set the child non-challenging tasks, and give less encouragement for high expectations. (p. 300)

This idea of teachers' beliefs as self-fulfilling prophecies was the subject of a research study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), who labeled it the "Pygmalion Effect" after the play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw in which a character determines that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated" (as cited in Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968, p. 183). In this study, teachers at one public elementary school each received a list that identified one to nine of their students for the upcoming school year as "late bloomers" who were "most likely to show an academic spurt in the next year" (p. 66). In actuality, the test that supposedly identified these "spurters" was a standardized intelligence test disguised with a fictitious name, and the students identified were chosen at random. When the teachers, who administered the test but did not see the scores, re-administered the test at the end of the school year, the researchers found a significant difference between the IQ scores of the experimental and control groups; the students who had been identified as "spurters" made

significantly greater gains in their IQ scores than the other students, particularly in grades one and two, suggesting that the teachers' belief that these students would make great gains caused them to interact with the students in a way that made it so. While both the design and analysis used in this study have been the subjects of criticism (Elashoff & Snow, 1971), Rosenthal and Jacobson still argue that their results support the idea of teachers' beliefs as self-fulfilling prophecies.

The findings of the current study also may support the idea that music teachers' beliefs about students' musical ability may act as self-fulfilling prophecies. Deena believes that all students have musical potential and expects that they will all develop some level of musical competence. During my observation in her classroom, I found that all but a very few of Deena's students were competent singers by the time they reached fifth grade. While I cannot say with any certainty that one caused the other, these two things may not be mere coincidence. It may be that Deena's belief that all of her students are musical drives her to persist in helping them all to develop their musical abilities, leading to some degree of musical competence, or an "average musical ability," among all of her students. It may be that Deena's desire to not "lose hope" in the musical potential of all of her students causes her to communicate (explicitly or implicitly) this confidence to her students so they keep trying until they succeed, similar to Vartuli's (2005) observation that a teacher who sees all children, even those with lower abilities, "as reachable, teachable, and worthy of the attention and effort it takes to help them learn. . . . has an important positive influence on children's self-perceptions about academic outcomes and achievement" (p. 77). It also may be that Deena's goal of getting her students to "feel like they're musicians" helps them to believe that they in fact *are*, which in turn may lead to greater motivation and subsequent success because the students feel musically capable. This would suggest that, in

addition to “formal music learning [leading] to a self-view of being *unmusical*” (Ruddock & Leong, 2005, p. 20), music education also has the potential to lead to a student self-view of being *musical*, depending at least in part on the beliefs and actions of the music teacher. Teachers should be aware of their beliefs about the musical abilities of their students and examine the ways in which these beliefs may influence their interactions with students and have an impact on achievement in the music classroom.

Responding to Individual Differences

Because Deena acknowledges that all of her students have varying musical abilities and bring with them unique backgrounds, experiences, strengths, and interests, she believes that each of them requires something different from her as the music teacher in order to help him or her continue to grow and progress in his or her musical development. By teaching all students the same general content and skills but tailoring the difficulty level, Deena is able to provide learning experiences in which lower-achieving students are not frustrated to the point of giving up and higher-achieving students remain challenged rather than, as Deena puts it, “checking out.” This is similar to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1988) concept of flow or “optimal experience,” which “requires a balance between the challenges perceived in a given situation and the skills a person brings to it” (p. 30). It is important for all music educators to realize that students develop musically at different rates and varying levels; thus individualization of instruction to meet the individual needs of students is necessary in order to keep all students engaged and progressing musically.

Not only does Deena individualize instruction to meet students’ varying needs, but she also works to “normalize” ability differences among the students in her classroom, explicitly addressing with her students the fact that they are all “at different places” in their musical

development. Because Deena confronts these ability differences with her students in a way that treats them as normal and natural, her students accept and even welcome tasks of varying difficulty among them. Observing this in Deena's classroom reminded me of "good fit" reading groups in general education classroom settings in which students are helped to understand that finding a "just right book" is more important than trying to read the most difficult book they can find. In these situations, as well as in Deena's classroom, students seem to appreciate that it is acceptable for them to be performing tasks of varying difficulty as long as they feel that their efforts, and thus *they*, have value. Deena communicates to her students that "all parts are important" and "it all helps to make a good piece of music, when you have all the different parts together;" this helps her students feel comfortable performing and/or choosing parts of varying difficulty because each student believes that he or she is making a contribution regardless of his or her current skill level. Music educators in all settings should work to "normalize" ability differences in their classrooms, helping students understand the importance of music learning experiences that meet their individual needs and communicating to them that, no matter what their current level of ability, their music-making is valued.

Deena's normalization of ability differences and inclusion of a variety of task difficulty levels is somewhat similar to the practice of participatory music-making described by Turino (2008). In participatory performance, it is expected that "everyone present can, and in fact should, participate in the sound and motion of the performance" (p. 29). In order to accommodate the participation of all persons, participatory music-making typically involves "a variety of roles that differ in difficulty and degrees of specialization required" (p. 30), thus giving all individuals an entry point into the music-making and normalizing the existence of a spectrum of ability levels. According to Turino, "in participatory contexts, the full range of the

learning curve is audibly and visually present and provides reachable goals for people at all skill levels” (p. 31). This description also applies well to the musical practices in Deena’s classroom: “[In Deena’s music classroom] the full range of the learning curve is audibly and visually present and provides reachable goals for [students] at all skill levels.” It is vitally important that music educators be aware of the opportunities for meaningful musical interaction that they can and should provide to students at ALL skill levels so that ALL may engage in and experience the fulfillment of making music and feel that their musical contributions are valued.

Providing a Nurturing Environment for Musical Growth

In order for students to develop their musical abilities, Deena believes she first must establish a positive classroom environment in which the musical potential of all students can be nurtured. Deena creates this positive learning environment by helping her students feel safe, supported, and empowered musically. By doing so, she enables them all to “tap into” their musical potential and develop their musical abilities to the greatest extent possible.

The components to the positive learning environment Deena believes she must build in order for her students to become musicians are strikingly similar to Maslow’s (1943) “hierarchy of needs” theory, in which he suggests that human motivation is based on the fulfillment of a progression of needs that eventually lead one to self-actualization. According to Maslow’s theory, in order for a person to be motivated to fulfill more advanced needs, he or she must first fulfill more basic needs. The most basic of type of needs are physiological, which include food, water, and sleep. Once physiological needs have been met, a person seeks to fulfill the need for safety, followed by the need to feel love and affection. Next are esteem needs, which include self-esteem and personal worth. If all of these needs have been met, a person can then focus on fulfilling the need for self-actualization, which Maslow describes as “the desire to become ...

everything that one is capable of becoming” (p. 382). Similar to Maslow’s hierarchy, Deena believes in establishing a positive classroom environment in which a parallel progression of student needs are met (as illustrated in Table 1), with the end goal being of students feeling a sense of empowerment that will allow them to take full ownership of their music learning and music making by helping them feel that they ARE musicians.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs:	Deena’s components of a positive learning environment:
Physiological needs	
Safety needs	Students feel <i>safe</i> .
Love needs	Students feel <i>supported</i> .
Esteem needs	(Students feel <i>supported</i> .)
Self-actualization	Students feel <i>empowered</i> .

Table 1. Parallels between Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Deena’s Components of a Positive Learning Environment

Deena’s conceptualization of this positive classroom environment stresses that it is one in which students must feel a sense of emotional safety, as well as feel supported by their music teacher and classmates, in order to succeed musically. In a study of three women who felt they lacked musical ability, Abril (2007) discovered that all three of them “pinpointed a specific incident [from] their school music experiences, which they related to current singing anxiety” and lack of musical participation (p. 12). In a similar study of adults who labeled themselves “non-singers,” Whidden (2008) found a “strong emotional connection between childhood singing experiences and how [the participants] perceived themselves as singers later in life” and

that “childhood experiences of singing adversely affected their participation in singing as an adult” (p. 11). Deena, however, seems to strive for the opposite:

I want to make [music class] a positive experience. I don't want anybody to quit music because of something that I said. I want them to be able to enjoy [music class] and to continue on [engaging in music] *because* it was such a good experience.

Deena is not the only music educator to stress the crucial role that psychological and emotional support plays in the development of musical confidence and, subsequently, the development of musical skill. Richards and Durrant (2003) conducted a study of 40 adults who believed they could not sing but agreed to participate in a group called the “Can’t Sing Choir.” After studying their experiences over a six-month time period, the researchers made the following conclusion:

The singers in the study faced many obstacles, including fear of making mistakes and embarrassment, to which they made reference more often than to any musical or physiological matters. It would seem that, for some adults, psychological barriers to singing are greater than physiological ones. (p. 85)

It is for these reasons that Deena believes it is so important to provide her students with a positive music learning environment in which they will feel emotionally safe, free to make mistakes, and supported by their teacher and peers. Rather than simply believing that poor singing is the result of physical issues or “tone-deafness,” music educators should be aware of the role that psychological barriers can play in learning to sing, as well as in other modes of music-making, so that they can provide the appropriate support necessary to overcome these psychological barriers.

Deena also believes that her students must trust her and know that she believes in them, which is similar to a conclusion made by Richards and Durrant (2003) regarding the power of teacher-student interactions:

The [choir] director was key in this process [of helping participants develop their singing ability and confidence]. Her musical skill, her ability to communicate without patronizing and her understanding of vocal development were significant attributes in shaping the choir. Singers themselves frequently described her constant reinforcing as motivating and encouraging, quoting phrases that she often used—such as ‘you can’t be wrong.’ An atmosphere of trust was quickly established due to her human-compatible teaching style. (p. 86)

It is important that music educators consider the impact they can have in helping students develop musical confidence, self-esteem, and empowerment and the powerful role this can play in the development of students’ musical abilities.

Development of Musical Identity

Deena believes that helping students to develop musical identities is key to enabling them to fully develop their musical abilities. Burnard (2003) found something similar in her study of the musical self-perceptions of people who were not professional musicians. While numerous participants labeled themselves as “unmusical” and described developing this non-musical identity in part through negative experiences with school music, one participant recalled not perceiving himself as particularly musical until receiving encouragement from his teachers, which helped him to “develop a musical identity that consequently enabled him to develop musically” (p. 30). After his music teacher started giving him “musical jobs,” this participant “started seeing [himself] as a performer and musician” (p. 31). Similarly, by allowing students

to have a voice in and feel that they are making a contribution to their music classes and by helping them feel like musicians, Deena believes she will help her students develop a sense of empowerment that will drive them to want to develop and use their musical abilities.

Deena helps her students develop their identities as musicians in part by communicating her confidence in their abilities. Deena observes, “They don’t always [see themselves as musicians]. They don’t always realize it. And so I try to tell them.” When I asked Deena whether her students believe that they all have musical potential, she stated, “I think they believe that *I* believe it,” which eventually rubs off on them. Music educators should be aware of the power of developing a musical identity and the role that they can and do play in their students’ musical identity development (or lack thereof).

Deena’s declaration to her students that they all have musical potential and can develop musical skills in order to help them see themselves as musical is particularly striking when juxtaposed with the findings of Whidden (2008, 2010). In her study of adults who labeled themselves “non-singers,” Whidden discovered that many of them remembered negative childhood experiences with school music in which their attempts to sing were criticized by their teachers and subsequently assumed “complete belief in [this] authority figure’s proclamation” that they could not sing (2008, p. 11). Because they were so young, these individuals were “ill-equipped to challenge such a statement and simply never did” (2010, p. 91). However, is it possible that the opposite effect could occur through the same means? Could children simply accept the “proclamation” by their music teachers that they *are* musical? Music educators should consider the power of their judgments of students, the ways in which students sense these judgments, and the resultant effects on their musical identity development.

Additionally, Whidden describes a “vicious circle” (2010, p. 91) in which students were led to believe they could not sing, which led them not to engage in singing, which in turn prevented them from further developing their singing skills. But could a reverse of this “vicious circle” occur? If music teachers worked to communicate to their students that all of them are musicians and can make music, might this lead students to want to engage in music-making, which in turn might develop their musical abilities, leading them to believe that they CAN indeed make music and ARE musicians? Although the current study did not examine the experiences and beliefs of Deena’s students, I believe that IS possible and that I witnessed it in Deena’s classroom.

Relationships Between Beliefs

Deena believes that each of her students has the potential to develop musical skills and that it is her duty to help each of them do so, which seems to be related to her belief that the main goal of her music program is to enable all students to participate in music-making music after they leave her classroom. This belief is quite different from those of other elementary music teachers surveyed by Carter (1986). In choosing a descriptor for their teaching philosophies, many of these teachers indicated that the goal of the music program is “to create a learning environment that will not only develop the talents of the musically gifted but will develop aesthetic musical responsiveness in all students” (p. 76). This statement seems to imply that the “talent” to develop musical performance skills only exists in a minority of students and that all others should only expect to develop the ability to be responsive audience members.

Deena’s beliefs that all students can develop musical skills and that the purpose of her program is to enable future music-making through the development of these skills also seem to relate to her beliefs about assessment. Because Deena sees it as her duty to help all students

develop independent musical skills, she believes that it is important to assess each student individually because doing so helps her to ensure that each student is progressing and allows her to tailor future classroom activities in order to “to keep them all engaged and keep them all moving up.” In contrast to this are music teachers who may be opposed to assessing students individually for fear that they might “discourage those students who tried hard but lacked the talent to really excel in music” (Chiodo, 2001, p. 18). An exploratory survey by Shouldice (2012) discovered a possible relationship between elementary music teachers’ beliefs about musical ability and their beliefs about whether and how students should be assessed in elementary general music, suggesting that teachers who believe assessment hurts students’ musical self-esteem are less likely to believe that anyone can be good at music and more likely to believe that students should be assessed on their effort and participation rather than their musical skills. In addition to developing awareness of their beliefs about musical ability, music educators should reflect on their beliefs about the purpose of music education, their beliefs about assessment, and the ways in which these two sets of beliefs may or may not be related to their beliefs about musical ability as well as the ways in which these beliefs relate to their actions in the classroom with students.

The Role of Music Teacher Education

Because of the power that teachers’ beliefs have in shaping their actions in the classroom and thus the experiences of their students, it is important that music teacher education programs address the beliefs held by pre-service music teachers. Pre-service teachers bring with them a host of beliefs about music teaching and learning formed throughout the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) of their years in school music. “If we choose to disregard the entering beliefs of pre-service music educators, those unchallenged beliefs will have a marked

effect on the perspectives and practices of future music educators, most likely reinforcing ‘business as usual’” (Thompson, 2007, p. 34). Therefore, music teacher educators have a responsibility to help pre-service music teachers uncover these existing beliefs.

Required music education methods courses provide an ideal opportunity for pre-service music teachers to reflect on their existing beliefs, such as those about musical ability and the purpose of music education. Thompson (2007) and Campbell, Thompson, and Barrett (2010) suggest a variety of strategies that might be used to uncover beliefs; these include reflecting on past teaching and learning experiences, developing a definition of a “successful teacher,” reflecting on successful or unsuccessful past teachers, and generating a personal metaphor for teaching. Because Nespor (1987) posits alternativity—“[conceptualization] of ideal situations differing significantly from present realities” (p. 319)—as a characteristic of beliefs, I would also suggest having pre-service music teachers construct stories of “the perfect music classroom,” “the perfect music teacher,” or “the perfect music student” as a means of revealing beliefs about music teaching and learning.

Additionally, music teacher educators might help pre-service music teachers discover possibilities for alternate beliefs. This might be done by constructing a “dialogue-centered” methods class (Scheib, 2012) in which students are encouraged to share and discuss varying viewpoints. Raths (2001) also suggests “confronting the [teacher] candidate with dissonance,” new ideas that contradict students’ existing beliefs. By engaging in activities such as these, music teacher educators can help pre-service music teachers challenge their own beliefs through the steps of awareness, analysis, discussion, and reconsideration (Vartuli, 2005).

Also, in-service music teachers should continue to reflect on their beliefs and the extent to which beliefs align with teaching practice throughout their careers. Without reflection on

beliefs, teachers' actions in the classroom may not be congruent with what they believe (Brickhouse, 1990; Van Zoest et al., 1994). According to Vartuli (2005), "discrepancies between beliefs and practice need to be examined and discussed as teachers appraise situations in their own classrooms" (p. 82).

Suggestions for Future Research

Music Teacher Beliefs and Practice

While the current study and others (Biasutti, 2010; Brändström, 1999; Clelland, 2006; Evans et al., 2000; Hewitt, 2006; Legette, 2002, 2012; Shouldice, 2009, 2012) provide some insight into the beliefs about musical ability held by music teachers, more research is needed on this topic, especially that which examines the ways in which these beliefs relate to teaching practice and the experiences of students in the music classroom. Broader studies involving a larger number of music teachers might reveal general information about musical ability beliefs and possibly trends across subgroups of teachers; for example, researchers might compare the beliefs of music teachers at various levels (e.g., elementary/middle/high school), teaching settings (e.g., instrumental/choral/general music), or years of teaching experience. Such studies also might investigate relationships between beliefs about musical ability and other topics, such as assessment practices and beliefs or beliefs about the purpose of music education.

In addition to broader studies such as these, more naturalistic, in-depth exploration of music teachers' beliefs about musical ability also is needed. The current study examined the beliefs and teaching practice of one teacher who believes that all students have the potential to develop musical skills rather than holding the belief that only some among us are born with the "gift" of music. But what about a teacher who *does* believe in the idea of musical ability as an innate, selective talent? How would this belief manifest itself in his or her actions in the

classroom and interactions with students and/or relate to his or her beliefs about the purpose of music education? In what ways would this be similar to or different from the beliefs and practice of a teacher like Deena? Exploring these questions might help us understand the impact that ability beliefs can have on what happens in the music classroom.

More research also is needed concerning the ways in which music teacher education programs challenge or reinforce beliefs about musical ability and whether they have the potential to effect belief change in pre-service music teachers. Future studies might focus on the process of reflection on beliefs, such as those about musical ability and the purpose of music education, among pre-service music teachers. What strategies are most effective for helping pre-service teachers consider these beliefs? To what factors can the development of these beliefs be attributed? How might these beliefs be changed? Exploring these questions could shed light on the ways in which music teacher educators might encourage the examination (and possible reconsideration) of pre-service music teachers' beliefs.

Experiences and Beliefs of Students

One limitation of the current study is that it did not investigate the experiences or beliefs of the students. For example, Deena believes she is helping her students to “feel like musicians” and to believe that they have musical potential, but, because I did not interview her students, I have no idea whether this is indeed the case. Future studies might explore the experiences and self-perceptions of students in a classroom such as Deena's. How do they feel in the music classroom? What are their beliefs about their own musical ability and musical potential? To what degree do they “feel like musicians?” A similar study also might be undertaken in the classroom of a teacher who believes in the idea of innate, selective musical talent to see how those students feel about themselves as musicians.

Previous researchers have found that many adults credit their poor musical self-perceptions to negative experiences in school music programs which led them to view themselves as “unmusical” or “non-singers” (Abril, 2007; Burnard, 2003; Ruddock, 2012; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Whidden, 2008, 2010). But what about persons who *do* view themselves as musical and/or as singers? Future research might investigate these self-perceptions and the factors that have contributed to their development. Results of several studies suggest that positive experiences with supportive teachers may facilitate musical achievement, musical self-esteem, and/or musical identity development (Burnard, 2003; Richards & Durrant, 2003), but more research is needed on this topic.

More studies also are needed that examine children’s beliefs about musical ability. Davis (1994) found that as many as 81% of adults surveyed believe that musical achievement requires an “innate talent” or “gift,” and Evans, Bickel, and Pendarvis (2000) found that this belief is present among many children at ages 12 to 17 years. However, Shouldice (2013) found that only 11% of children in grades 1 through 4 believe that only some people can be good musicians while the other 89% believe that anyone can be a good musician. Future researchers might explore musical ability/talent beliefs among children, including what factors may contribute to these beliefs as well as when and how these beliefs may shift.

The development of students’ beliefs about their own musical ability and potential is another important topic for future research. Randles (2011) found that students’ perceptions of themselves as “good musicians” weakened across grades 4 through 12, and Shouldice (2013) found that students’ perceptions of themselves as “good musicians” drops as early as second grade. While it is possible that students simply develop more realistic views of their own musical ability as they get older, it also may be that environmental factors are influencing the

development of more negative self-perceptions, possibly related to beliefs about musical ability or talent. Asmus (1986) found that “students made a shift in their internal attributions from unstable, effort related, to stable, ability related causes. . . . [which] may be a function of learning both in the music class and in life” (p. 271). Future studies might examine further these shifts in students’ musical self-perceptions and attributions for musical success or failure and explore possible causes. Researchers also might investigate whether there is a relationship between these beliefs and the beliefs of their music teachers as well as the ways in which teachers may communicate these beliefs to their students.

Studies also are needed that further examine beliefs about musical ability held by the general population. How prevalent is the belief in innate, selective musical talent among the general population? How strongly do persons hold this belief? What factors or experiences have influenced the development (or absence) of this belief? Researchers might also study how these beliefs could be changed so that our society might come to believe in the musical potential of all human beings.

Closing Thoughts

Because beliefs and actions are inextricably intertwined, it is inevitable that music teachers’ beliefs about musical ability—specifically the extent to which they believe each of their students can be musically successful—will have an impact on what they do in the classroom and the ways in which they interact with students. It follows logically, then, that their beliefs about musical ability likely will be imparted to their students, whether implicitly or explicitly. For this reason, there is a strong chance that students may assume beliefs about musical ability, including beliefs about their *own* musical ability, that are similar to those of their teachers.

Sadly, some students have fallen victim to these beliefs. They perceive that their music teachers have decided that they lack musical “talent,” thus deeming them “unmusical,” and as a result, these students adopt this belief about themselves. For some, this may be the result of subtle messages, such as not being called on to perform alone in music class, while for others it may be more explicit, such as being asked not to sing at a concert but to silently move their lips instead. However,

The youngster in the third-grade choir who is told to mouth the words but not actually to sing with the other children confronts a situation of relative adversity. . . . [in which he] generally has no way to combat such adverse conditions, and almost certainly has no way of knowing what might be done to improve the singing. . . . To the child, the only thing wrong with the singing is likely to be that he or she is the one doing it. (Kingsbury, 1988, p. 77)

As a result of this, the child comes to believe that he is “unmusical,” failing to even question this belief because he assumes that his music teacher is the expert and his judgment infallible. In the words of Kingsbury, this child’s “nonmusicality [is] socially developed in the context of social power relationships in which they were at an insuperable disadvantage” (p. 78).

When beliefs about musical ability function in a way that limits the musical potential and thus the musical future of students, it becomes an issue of social justice. School music programs often appeal to and/or facilitate the progress of students who show high achievement in music and/or learn music quickly and thus are deemed “talented,” while the rest are relegated to music listening, music appreciation, or no music education at all. The result is that these students are “musically inhibited by a society's lack of an arrangement for their [music] education, while the talented few are given an imbalance of full and continuous attention” (Campbell, 2010, p. 218).

Thus, students who are not labeled as “talented” essentially are excluded from music education and future musical participation.

In addition to stifling the musical potential of many students, this practice of focusing on “the best” while leaving “the rest” by the musical wayside also may be to blame, at least in part, for recent declines and cuts to school music programs. Blacking (1987) argues, “*The value of the arts in a society depends on how they are defined and used*” (p. 105). If we as a society treat music as an activity in which only a select minority of the population have the potential to participate successfully, we cannot expect society at large to value music deeply and to fight for the inclusion of music education in the school curriculum. Why would they when so many believe that music education is only for the “talented” rather than for all?

A revolution in the curriculum is unlikely to occur until there has been a revolution in our thinking about the arts and artists. The idea that educationalists must be converted ‘to the belief that arts are as important as reading, writing and arithmetic, not a disposable extra’ will not carry much conviction as long as people maintain the defeatist, elitist notion that artistic talent is a ‘rare gift.’ (Blacking, 1987, p. 120)

Our society might come to value music and music education more if we were to empower all members of our society to participate in the practice of making music by sending a clear message that ALL among us have musical potential and can develop musical competence. But how could this daunting task possibly be achieved? How could we change the dominant belief about musical ability held by an entire culture?

It would be easy to throw our hands up and say that we cannot possibly accomplish this feat, but I believe that it starts with music education. More specifically, it starts with teachers like Deena, a music teacher who believes in the musical potential of each and every single one of

her students. A music teacher who is determined to help every student develop the skills to make music independently and, more importantly, tries to help ALL of them to feel that they ARE musicians. By focusing “on what they CAN do,” rather than only on what they cannot. By providing students with music learning experiences that “meet them where they are.” By believing that all students can “get there.” By refusing to “lose hope.” By assuming that “everybody has something” but are just “at different places.” If we as music educators truly believe that all students can grow into musically competent individuals and hold it as our mission to help them all do so, we can help nurture the musicality in all human beings and send a message that musical participation is, indeed, for everyone.

“Musical competence grows—or withers—in the context of particular social relationships.”

(Kingsbury, 1988, p. 78)

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

One Elementary Music Teacher's Beliefs About Musical Ability: Connections to Teaching Practice and Classroom Culture CONSENT FORM

You are being asked to participate in a research study of your beliefs about students' musical abilities and how this relates to what you do in the classroom. You have been selected as a possible participant in this research study because you are an elementary music teacher who believes all students are musical. Your participation in this study will involve approximately 10 classroom observations by the researcher (one school day each), 3-5 interviews with the researcher (45-60 minutes each), and 5-10 brief written reflections. You will be provided access to all findings of this research.

You will not benefit directly from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding of how the beliefs of music teachers relate to teaching practice and student learning. There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary; you may choose not to participate at all or terminate your participation at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to answer any questions and still participate in the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the recording of your interview, as well as any transcripts and notes that have been made, will be destroyed. If you withdraw from the study, information gathered in your classroom and from my conversation with you will not be used in my research.

All answers and personal information will be kept confidential. If it is necessary or appropriate to use individual answers in the final product of this research, unless you indicate otherwise, your name will be changed and/or omitted. The data will be kept on an external hard drive in the researcher's home; only the researcher will have access to the data. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will remain anonymous. Since the nature of this study involves the collection of data from a specific and distinct type of subject, you may face the risk of not being completely unidentifiable. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. You will be told of any significant findings that develop during the course of the study that may influence your willingness to continue to participate in the research. You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in this study.

If you have concerns or questions about this study, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher (Cynthia Taggart: 209 Music Practice Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824, taggartc@msu.edu, 517-432-9678).

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University Human

Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

research participant/interviewee signature

researcher/interviewer signature

printed name

date

I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the classroom observations and interviews.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Initials _____

You will be given a copy of this form to keep

Appendix B: Preliminary Interview Questions

- Please tell me a little about yourself.

Probes: How long have you been teaching?

How long have you been in your current job?

Have you always taught elementary general music?

- How did you decide to become a music teacher?
- Why did you become a music teacher?

Probes: Did anything from your own school music experience inspire you?

- Tell me what it's like to be a music teacher.

Probes: What is your favorite thing about being a music teacher?

What is your least favorite thing about being a teacher?

- Tell me a little about your general beliefs about musical ability.

Probes: Where does musical ability come from?

What are the factors that determine musical ability?

- Describe a student who succeeds easily in your classroom.

Probes: How do you interact with students who succeed easily?

What strategies do you use?

- Describe a student who struggles/does not succeed easily in your classroom.

Probes: How do you interact with students who struggle?

What strategies do you

- Describe a student who is musical.

Probes: What do musical students look and sound like?

What can they do?

- Describe a student who is not musical.

Probes: What do students who are not musical look and sound like?

What can they do (or not do)?

- What does it mean to be musical?

Probes: What does being musical involve?

When one is musical, what can they do?

Who can be musical?

- One student in your class is very successful while another has struggled for years. What is the difference between these two students? To what do you attribute the differences in their achievement/ability?

Appendix C: Email Journal Questions

Email Reflection Questions for Week 1 (10/29-11/01)

You mentioned that there have been some “meanness” issues with the fifth grade students (compounded due to the fact that they come to music in mixed groupings rather than intact classes) and that you felt this could be impacting their progress in music class.

- 1) What kind of classroom environment do you believe maximizes students’ musical success in your classroom?
- 2) What are some environmental factors that you feel hinder or hurt students’ musical success in your classroom?
- 3) What strategies do you use to encourage the environment/interactions that enable students’ musical success and/or minimize the environmental factors that impede students’ musical success?

I noticed that you frequently do NOT sing with your students and instead hum or sing a different part. For example, in second grade on Tuesday, you got the students started singing “Old Oak Tree,” but then didn’t sing it with them; instead, you hummed the chord roots.

- 1) Why do you NOT sing songs with your students?
- 2) Why do you add a different part?

I noticed that you frequently give students a choice in what they do. For example, after reviewing “Oh Sinner Man” and the chord roots in second grade on Thursday, you then told the class, “I want you to pick your favorite part, and let’s see if you can do the entire thing without my singing voice!” In the same second grade class they were mixing up various parts (Bow Belinda, Skip to My Lou, chord roots, rhythm pattern), and on the last time through you let them choose the part they wanted to do for each of the four verses/repetitions.

- 1) What are your reasons for giving students opportunities to choose their parts? What is the value in this? Why do you feel it is important?

Please describe any student(s) you noticed who was particularly successful with or particularly struggling with a musical task this week (e.g., what was the task, were you surprised they were succeeding/struggling, why do you think they were succeeding/struggling, etc.).

Email Reflection Questions (11/08-11/15)

Please describe any student(s) you noticed who was particularly struggling with a musical task this week (e.g., what was the task, were you surprised they were struggling, why do you think they were struggling, etc.).

Please describe any student(s) you noticed who was particularly successful with a musical task this week (e.g., what was the task, were you surprised they were succeeding, why do you think they were succeeding, etc.).

When playing the concentration game with the fifth graders in rotation 1 on Tuesday, M. didn't say her numbers quite on the snaps and was "out." Some teachers might avoid calling attention to the fact that she made a mistake in an attempt to not embarrass the student. However, you responded by pointing out to the class, "Now because M. made a mistake, everybody subtract one from your number."

- 1) Why were you unafraid to call attention to M.'s mistake?
- 2) Many people believe/argue that music is about perfection, producing a perfect musical work/performance. How do you feel about this?

As Mr. L.'s fourth grade class was lining up on Tuesday, P. had an outburst which appeared to stem from his frustration struggling to play recorder material ("Ode to Joy" and the three "Hot Marimba" parts) while others were celebrating that they were able to play that material.

- 1) Do students notice differing abilities among their classmates and themselves? How do you know?
- 2) If they do notice, how do you explain these differences to the students?
- 3) How do you help all students be comfortable participating in your class despite these differing abilities?

Email Reflection Questions (12/03-12/07)

I've noticed that you have a "special helper" for each class (grades 1-4).

- 1) How are students chosen to be the special helper, and what does this role entail?
- 2) Why do you have these special helpers?

I've noticed that you use many of the same songs and/or activities across various grade levels. (For example, I've heard/seen you used the "Who Has the [Object]" game with both second and fifth graders, "Land of the Silver Birch" with both second and fourth graders, and "A Chubby Little Snowman" with both kindergarteners and second graders.)

- 1) For what reasons do you use the same songs/activities at different grade levels?

In a mini-interview (11-15-12) you were telling me about a student and mentioned that you want "to focus on what they CAN do rather than what they can't."

- Why do you want to focus on what students CAN do rather than what they can't?
- In what ways do you try to focus on what students CAN do rather than what they can't?
- Describe a student for whom you try to focus on what they CAN do rather than what they can't. How does this impact your interactions (the ways in which you interact) with that student?

Please describe any student(s) you noticed who was particularly successful with or particularly struggling with a musical task this week (e.g., what was the task, were you surprised they were succeeding/struggling, why do you think they were succeeding/struggling, etc.).

Final Email Reflection Questions (01/08)

Purpose of elementary general music...

- What are your priorities for your elementary music program? What are your main goals for your students in terms of learning, skill development, etc?
- How do your priorities/goals relate to your planning what you will do in the classroom?
- How do your priorities/goals relate to your beliefs about students' musical abilities? In what ways do your beliefs about students' musical abilities impact your beliefs about the purpose of your program?

Assessment follow-up...

In our last interview, you talked about your assessment practices and mentioned that you see assessment as a way for students to develop independence.

- Why do you believe it important for students to develop musical independence?
- What are the benefits of students becoming musically independent?

You also mentioned that assessment is a way for you to know what each student needs in order to keep them engaged and progressing musically.

- Can you give an example of a way in which you use assessment information to help keep your students progressing musically?
- Do you expect all students to achieve at the same level on your assessments? Why or why not?
- In what ways do your beliefs about assessment relate to your beliefs about your students' musical abilities?

Appendix D: Codebook

Ability
Ability-All can Improve
Ability-Differences
Ability-Different strengths
Ability-Everybody has something
Ability-Inconsistent
Ability-malleable
Ability-Musical in different ways
Ability-Natural talent
Ability-Student awareness
Ability-Student potential
Ability-Teacher Expectations
Adapting-Individualizing instruction
All students are musical
Aptitude
Assessment
Awareness-Lack of ability
Background/Descriptive Info
Behavior
Beliefs & Practice
Celebrating success
Challenges-High
Challenging the students
Classroom management
Comparison-Other Subjects
Composition
Confidence conveyed: You WILL succeed
Cool to see/hear
Decisions-In the moment
Developing musical identity
Differences in ability-Addressing w/students!
Discussion/Interpretations
Effort-Try your best
Environment-Positive/Supportive
Environment-Safe
Environment-Safe-Lack
Expectations-Student
Favorite/Rewarding
Focus on what they CAN do
Goals
High expectations communicated
Individual response
Individual response-Chanting
Individual response-Other

Individual response-Playing
Individual response-Singing
Individuals!
Influence-Experiences or lack thereof
Influence-Experiences outside school
Influences on success or failure
Influences-Other
Knowing her students
Lifelong Interest Participation
Love of teaching/music
Maximizing music learning
Mistakes-Awareness
Mistakes-fear of
Mistakes-laughing at
Mistakes-modeling!
Mistakes-not a big deal
Mistakes-reassurance
Motivation
Motivation-Challenge
Multiple parts-Against teacher
Multiple parts-Among students
Musical independence
My participation-observation
My reflections/memos
Not everybody is AT the same place
Not forcing participation
Not singing w/students
Peer issue
Peer review
Persistence/Investment in student success
Planning
Playing ability
Positive demeanor
Practice over time
Praise/Calling attention to positive
Progress over time
Providing opportunities for success
Purpose/Philosophy
Rapport/Relationships
Respect
Rhythm ability
Singing ability
Singing ability-Group
Singing ability-Individual
Singing/Assessment Game
Small group activity/response

Social issue?
Strong students
Strong students as resource/model
Struggling students
Student choice
Student choice-Decision making
Student choice-Group-Or alone
Student choice-Mode of musicking
Student choice-Which part
Student confidence/self-esteem
Student creativity
Student engagement
Student engagement-Looks different for each st.
Student engagement-Outside the classroom
Student enjoyment/fun/love of music
Student frustration
Student interests-Responding to
Student needs-Responding to
Student needs-Students' OWN awareness!
Student recognition
Student recognition-Recorder caroling
Student self-evaluation/self-critique
Student voice/contribution
Student voice/contribution-Special helper
Students helping each other
Success for all-different activities
Success for all-different levels
Success-Different for each
Success-Doesn't mean perfection
Success-Ease-Differences
Surprise
They are musicians
They're all so different!
Variety of activities
Variety of difficulty levels

Appendix E: Permission for Reprints

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