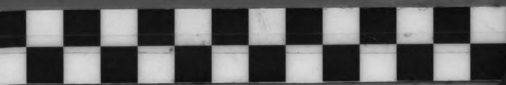


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**A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF BEGINNING BAND  
PROGRAM DESIGNS IN MICHIGAN**

**By**

**Margaret Elizabeth Babcock**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**MASTER OF MUSIC IN MUSIC EDUCATION**

**Department of Music**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF BEGINNING BAND PROGRAM DESIGNS IN MICHIGAN**

**By**

**Margaret Elizabeth Babcock**

Structures of five select beginning band programs were examined in order to determine the characteristics of successful program designs. Band directors from these programs were interviewed about the size, starting grade level, school type, instrumentation, class size and grouping for their programs.

These programs were found to have several factors in common including: (a) the satisfaction of the teachers involved with the program format, (b) the ability to group a large percentage of the instruction homogenously, (c) the existence of a heterogeneous full band experience, (d) team-teaching, (e) frequent, consistent, uninterrupted contact times with students for the entire first year, (f) full-year participation of the majority of students. Implications of these findings are discussed in relation to program format and continued research.

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## Introduction

There is a great deal of debate among practitioners in the field of music education over what is the best format for a beginning instrumental music program. This debate covers a variety of topics, including instrumentation, class size, aptitude and frequency of classes. While it is easy to find opinions on what is the best format for beginning instrumental music (Bish 1993, Fraedrich 1997, Gordon 1997, and Schull 1984), there is very little music education research to support the differing points-of-view.

Fraedrich (1997) argues for the importance of homogenous instrument classes in beginning band during the first year of instruction. The main advantage to this is that all attention can be focused on the particular skills required for one instrument, so that no time is wasted addressing the needs of different instruments.

Some educators advocate a mixed homogenous and heterogeneous start for instrumental music. Schull (1984) promotes homogenous instrument classes as the best method to begin instrumental music. He describes a model used in Fort Collins, Colorado, which has homogenous classes for six weeks during the summer prior to full band in school during the regular school year.

Bish (1993), in his article about Australian school band programs, also promotes a variation on homogenous instrument classes where classes are grouped by instrument family. In this format, all brass meet in one class, all woodwinds meet in another class, and percussion can be included in either class. However, the Australian model assigns each instrument family to different schools. For example, one school will have all woodwind students, while another will have all brass.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the argument presented by Gordon (1997) within the context of his work with Music Learning Theory. Under this model, beginning instrumentalists are grouped in small heterogeneous groupings. The rationale for the heterogeneous grouping is that students will have to constantly adjust for pitch, rhythm and will have to focus on blending the different timbres, which is not as necessary in homogenous groupings where all students are playing instruments with the same pitch tendencies. By placing students in a position of having to adjust for pitch and blend from the beginning, they will more rapidly develop their musicianship and aural skills (pp. 275-276).

Another method of beginning instrumental music grouping is “individualized instruction.” In this model, students meet in small groups (instrumentation of the groups is not important), but work individually on assignments. The role of the teacher is to assist students as they need help or when they wish to move ahead in the book (McCarthy, 1980).

There are several articles advocating different instrument grouping formats for beginning band programs. However, there has not been much research into the different grouping options. This is an area where research is needed to help beginning band directors and administrators design beginning band programs.

### Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the different beginning band program formats that exist in select beginning band programs in Michigan. The research questions included: (a) What are the different configurations of beginning band programs in

Michigan? (b) What different instrumentation groupings are used? (c) What are the class sizes? (d) How often do beginning band classes meet? (e) What are the participants' perceptions on what they feel is the optimal format for beginning band and why?

### Definitions

For the purposes of this study, beginning instrumental music or beginning band refers to the first year of instruction. Homogeneous instrumentation refers to a class configuration with all students playing the same instrument (i.e. all trumpets or all clarinets) and heterogeneous instrumentation refers to a class configuration with mixed instrumentation.

### Personal Orientation

My interest in instrument grouping patterns for beginning instrumental music programs developed out of the four years I spent teaching beginning band. The district in which I taught had a long standing tradition of excellence in instrumental music, and it was the opinion of all directors involved, that the success of the instrumental music program (6-12) was because of the method of design and implementation of the beginning instrumental music program. However, the principal of the elementary building where the instrumental music program began in sixth grade was disenchanted with the music program. When the sixth grade was moved out of the middle school and into a fifth and sixth-grade elementary building, the middle school design of the instrumental music program became more difficult to schedule. That, coupled with the fact that the design required several music teachers to be involved which made it more expensive than it might otherwise have been, led the principal to suggest changes needed to be made. Therefore

there was a conflict between music staff and the principal. What the music staff needed was research to support the benefits of the particular format being used for the success of the beginning music program. Unfortunately, the research in music education on instrumental grouping for beginning instrumental music programs did not exist.

My school district was not only district having this sort of discussion. Through the Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association (MSBOA) District 10 listserv, band directors in District 10 began an informal discussion on the various formats for beginning instrumental music programs. Questions that were asked included: (a) What grade-level do you begin your program? (b) How many times a week do you meet? (c) Do you meet in like-instrument or mixed-instrument classes? (d) How many students are in your classes? (e) What is your overall beginning instrumental music enrollment? Many other directors were being put in a position where they needed to defend their rationale for the format of their instrumental music programs.

I am an ideal candidate to research beginning band instrument groupings because I have experience teaching beginning band. Additionally, my beginning band experience led me to see the importance that beginning band plays in the success of an instrumental music, and therefore to see the value of conducting research on beginning band grouping formats. However, because I brought my own opinions about how beginning band should be structured, I was careful not to let my opinions influence the outcomes of my study.

## Literature Review

### Introduction

The review of related literature on instrument groupings can be divided into three main sections. The first is groupings by instrument: heterogeneous instrumentation, homogeneous instrumentation, or individualized instruction. The second is grouping by ability: homogeneous grouping by ability or heterogeneous grouping by ability within and between classes. Much of the literature pertinent to the topic of grouping practices comes from research outside of music education, which focuses on the subject of ability grouping or tracking. Therefore it is necessary to look at these tracking studies in general education in order to examine the issues related to grouping practices in music education. The third section addresses literature regarding the frequency with which instrumental music classes meet. The common belief among music educators is that the more often beginning classes meet, the more successful students will be. The question that needs to be answered is whether or not the formal body of research supports this assumption.

### Body of Research

#### Instrument grouping options

There is little research directed specifically at the relative merits of different instrument grouping options: heterogeneous groupings, homogenous groupings, or individualized instruction. With the exception of a study examining individualized instruction in band classes (McCarthy, 1980) there has not been systematic research in music education on instrumental groupings. Therefore, we need to look outside of the field of music education for a research base.

Heterogeneous grouping of instruments in beginning instrumental music classes share many traits in common with the practice of “within-class” grouping that is found in many regular education classrooms, particularly at the elementary level (Braddock, 1990; Davenport, 1993; Pigford, 1990). Within-class grouping happens when a heterogeneous class is divided into smaller groups for instruction in a particular subject. Research into grouping patterns suggests that problems arise from within-class grouping because the teacher’s time is divided amongst the different groups. The more groups there are, the less time each group has with the teacher receiving direct instruction, and the more time each group spends in non-directed activities (Pigford, 1990). In a heterogeneously grouped beginning instrumental music class, the natural divisions for within-class grouping may be based on the number of different instruments in the class. Any instruction that is specific to a particular instrument requires that the teacher instruct that group directly, which means that all students receive less direct instruction from the teacher. One of the complications of heterogeneous grouping of students in a regular education classroom that has lead to the practice of grouping is that teachers do not receive enough training on how to manage and deliver instruction to a heterogeneous group (Peltier, 1991; Pigford, 1990).

All of the research outside of music education with respect to homogenous grouping of students is in reference to homogenous grouping by ability. Therefore the research does not apply to a situation where the homogenous grouping in an instrumental music class is by instrument, not ability. As noted before, music educators have a lot of opinions regarding the merits of homogenous grouping by instrument, but this is an area where research needs to be done. However, when looking at the research on within-class

grouping, and the fact that this can be more difficult for teachers and students because it divides the teacher's time, one might assume that homogenous grouping by instrument would alleviate those difficulties without the negative psychological side-effects associated with homogenous grouping by ability (Peltier, 1991; Pigford 1990).

Some research in music education has been done with respect to individualized instruction in beginning instrumental music classes. McCarthy (1980) conducted a quasi-experimental study involving 1,199 fifth and sixth graders in a large urban school district. His study involved two treatment groups: half of the students received individualized instruction, and half received standard ensemble instruction. By using the Music Achievement Test (MAT) to assess music reading ability and the Watkins-Farnum Performance Achievement Scale to assess sight-reading, he examined whether individualized instruction or ensemble instruction would increase students' overall music reading ability (p. 67-68). He found that the students with above-average reading abilities who received individualized instruction had significantly better sight-reading scores than the students with equivalent reading abilities given traditional ensemble instruction. However, McCarthy did not find significant differences in sight-reading ability for all other students between the two treatment groups, nor did he find any significant differences for students in their overall music reading abilities as assessed by the MAT. These results were based on the evaluation of the test scores by three independent music educators and the use of regression analyses on the different variables for both the ensemble and the individualized instruction treatment groups.

### Ability grouping options

Grouping by ability is a common practice in instrumental music, particularly at more advanced levels. Ability grouping is not universally practiced in beginning band, but it is not unheard of, particularly in programs that use small group lesson instruction. In fact it is often the case that

given twelve clarinet players to schedule into group lessons and no building restrictions. . . many instrumental music teachers will place the best four clarinet players in one group, . . . the middle four in another group. . . and the bottom four in a third group. (Conway, 1998, p. 91)

Although there is little research on ability grouping in music education, there is a large body of general education research covering the advantages and disadvantages of ability grouping, which should be carefully considered by music educators when designing a beginning band program (Davenport, 1993; Hamm & Clawson, 1992; Peltier, 1991; and Pigford, 1990) . The research is consistent in pointing out that while homogenous grouping by ability, or tracking, is very common in education, there is little research to suggest that it is the best way to deliver instruction. The general assumption is that homogenous grouping benefits students because they work with other students with similar abilities. However, what research has found is that homogenous groupings limit opportunities for students, particularly low-ability students, harm the self-esteem and psychological health of students in low and average sections, and do not seem to benefit high-ability students any more than mixed-ability classes (Braddock, 1990; Davenport, 1993; Hamm, & Clawson, 1992; Peltier, 1991; Pigford, 1990).



Davenport (1993) wrote an article summarizing the research done on homogenous grouping of students by ability and the effects it has on students' mathematical performance. She looked at the effects on mathematical achievement, learning opportunities made available to students and tracking procedures. She found two main types of tracking: within-class grouping, which is the practice often found in elementary schools where a mixed-ability class is divided into ability groups for certain subjects, and grouping by class, which is more common in secondary school and is the practice of assigning students to classes or tracks of classes by ability. Davenport found that tracking, particularly at the secondary level, tends to widen the gap between high achievers and low achievers and that it limits the mathematical learning opportunities for low achievers, in part because the low ability classes were usually taught by less-experienced or less-qualified teachers. She further found that tracking practices tend to place a large percentage of female and minority students in the lower tracks.

Braddock (1990) also looks at the two main types of tracking that Davenport (1993) discussed, within-class and tracking by class assignment. His concern, however is that mistakes can be made in determining a student's placement, particularly if only a single criterion, such as reading or math skills, is used to determine placement. He states, "when schools use a single criterion for grouping decisions, students typically follow the same classmates (who are similar in reading skills, for example) from class to class, even though their abilities may differ in other subjects" (p. 447). Braddock (1990) and Peltier (1991) are also concerned about the negative psychological effects, such as lowered self-esteem, that can be associated with tracking, and with the missed learning opportunities

that homogeneously grouped students might have had in a heterogeneous mix. Braddock (1990) suggests there might be better regrouping options for instruction rather than traditional tracking. He suggests one solution might be a cooperative learning model where students work in “small, mixed-ability learning teams” (p. 449).

Hamm and Clawson (1992) conducted a quasi-experimental study looking at the influence of grouping on the behaviors of eighth grade students. They divided their sample (n=240) into two groups by their team assignment in eighth grade. The heterogeneous group was the team of students that included students enrolled in band and about 20 other students labeled “at-risk,” in addition to other students. The homogenous groups included students of equal ability level to the heterogeneous group. The students in the homogenous team were assigned to classes by ability. The students on the heterogeneous team were assigned to mixed-ability classes with some modifications (those modifications being that their math classes were divided into algebra and mixed ability pre-algebra sections). The study lasted six months and the data collected was analyzed using a chi-square analysis at a .05 level of significance. Hamm and Clawson found that students in the heterogeneous class have “more desirable behaviors than those students placed in homogenous classes” (p. 8). Students in the heterogeneous classes were less often absent or suspended (either in-school or out-of-school), than their counterparts in the homogenous classes. Therefore, they concluded that heterogeneous classes promote better student behavior.

Both Peltier (1991) and Pigford (1990) looked at the research into the purposes behind tracking. The conclusions drawn by both authors is that tracking is often done

because it is easier for teachers to manage than teaching to several ability levels at once, both from an instructional and a disciplinary viewpoint. Peltier (1991) found that benefits of tracking weren't obvious for any but the high-ability students. Additionally, both Peltier (1991) and Pigford (1990) found that instructional time in tracking programs reduced the amount of teacher and student interaction for middle and low-ability students and that they were exposed to fewer concepts.

What this suggests for instrumental music is that classes should not be grouped by ability. Ability grouping is common in music education, particularly as groups become more advanced, but ability grouping, at least in large group instruction, is not common at the beginning level, if only because it is difficult to determine the relative ability of beginners who have not yet begun to play their instruments. It is common with beginning instrumentalists that over the course of the year, their relative abilities change frequently depending on the particular skill being taught and the effort they put forth. Students who are excelling at the beginning are often not the students excelling by the end of the year. There are achievement and aptitude tests available to music teachers that could help determine ability groups, but these are rarely used. In fact, grouping is typically done by a teacher's observations of students (Conway, 1998).

Where ability grouping becomes an issue at the beginning level is with respect to small group instruction. Not all beginning programs use small group instruction, but many programs use small group instruction as part, if not all, of their curriculum. Based on the education research available, Conway (1998) recommends that small group instruction be of mixed-ability. This follows the same sorts of recommendations that Braddock (1990)

made for general education classes. However, these groups should include students from two ability levels (high-low, medium-low, high-medium) rather than a mix of three or more, because mixing high, medium and low students together is not advantageous for the middle ability students.

#### Frequency of classes

Hartley (1996) looked at the starting grade level and grade-level organization for beginning instrumental music programs with an interest in the attrition rates of programs beginning in fifth grade and programs beginning in sixth grade. She looked at enrollment numbers at the beginning of the program, the end of the first year and the beginning of seventh grade to see if there might be a relationship between grade level, grade-level organization and attrition rate of music students. This study involved 45 band directors and their programs in Indiana, Virginia and Ohio. The schools were evenly divided between programs beginning in fifth and programs beginning in sixth grade, and programs with both grades being in the same or different buildings. Hartley sent a questionnaire to all band directors in the study to collect her data. In addition to questions about grade level and grade-level organization, one of the questions she asked was the number of class meeting times per week to see if there was any relationship between meeting times and retention of students. Hartley found that “instrumental music programs that met daily had less attrition than those that met two or three times per week” (p. 305). In fact, she suggested that the frequency of meeting times was a larger influence on attrition than the grade level at which instrumental music was introduced or the programs’ grade-level organization. Therefore she suggested that when designing a beginning instrumental music

program, one should look at the grade level which will afford the most frequent meeting times as the level at which to start.

### Conclusion

The body of research with respect to beginning instrumental music is limited. There is very little for music educators to refer to when designing beginning instrumental music programs or advocating for a particular design. Although there is a substantial research base in education surrounding the ability grouping and tracking of students, very little has been done specifically in music education. This is an area in music education where more research is needed.

The same is true for grouping with respect to instrumentation. Researchers and practitioners have varied opinions as to the relative merits of homogenous, heterogeneous, or individualized instruction in beginning instrumental music classes, but almost no research with music programs or beginning instrumentalists exploring the different grouping options. Since the success of a music program depends a great deal on the success of the beginning instrumental music program, research into these issues is desperately needed.

## Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the different beginning band program formats that exist in select beginning band programs in Michigan. The research questions included: (a) What are the different configurations of beginning band programs in Michigan? (b) What different instrumentation groupings are used? (c) What are the class sizes? (d) How often do beginning band classes meet? (e) What are the participants' perceptions on what they feel is the optimal format for beginning band and why?

### Program Design

The design of this project included an email survey (see Appendices A and B) and qualitative interviews (see Appendix C). The goal of qualitative interview research is to gain a thorough understanding of the situation and experiences of a particular phenomenon and the people involved rather than to analyze the responses to questions and to test hypotheses in a more scientific or quantitative manner. The value of such research is in the stories and experiences that the participants relate (Seidman, 1998). Their experiences are of interest to others in the field of beginning band. Much can be learned from their experiences.

Qualitative interviewing has long been a standard practice of anthropologists. It is one of the primary means they use to understand people in their cultural context. However, its application to general research in education has been much more recent and has not been widely accepted historically. Still, qualitative interviewing in educational research can serve the same purpose as it does for anthropologists. That is, to understand people in the context of their environment (Seidman, 1998).

Initially, this study started off with the qualitative focused interview as only a part of the overall design. The study was to include both a survey of a larger population of beginning band directors, the purpose of which was to provide the background information necessary for the focused interviews to follow, and qualitative focused interviews of a smaller number of beginning band directors. After the study began that the qualitative focused interviews took on a more central role to the overall study design.

### Theoretical Perspective

My theoretical perspective originates from my background as an undergraduate anthropology major. Anthropologists rely heavily on qualitative research, so my exposure to this type of research makes me more comfortable working within a qualitative framework. Additionally, my background in anthropology led me to value the direct input of the participants in my study. I wanted the beginning band teachers in this study to answer the questions asked as thoroughly as possible, so that I could get a complete description of their points-of-view. It was my goal to get as open and complete a response as possible from each participant.

My theoretical perspective can also be described as phenomenological. Phenomenology is “the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses” (Patton, 1990, p. 69). Phenomenology is a philosophical perspective developed by Husserl, a German philosopher who worked during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The central question asked by phenomenology is ““what is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people”” (Patton, 1990, p. 69)? For the purposes of this study the people in question are the beginning band directors and

the phenomenon is instrument groupings and structure of beginning band programs. The use of a phenomenological approach requires that the researcher examine what the research participants experience (Patton, 1990). In this study, the participants' experiences were examined through focused interviews.

## Survey

### Pilot Survey

The first step in data collection was to send out a pilot survey to test the appropriateness of the email survey design and content. Seven people received a sample of the cover letter, which would be sent to prospective participants ahead of the survey itself, and the beginning band email survey. They were asked to read both, fill out the survey and return it, and to make any comments regarding the design and content of both the letter and survey. All seven members of the pilot survey group were either currently teaching beginning band outside of the state of Michigan or had previously taught beginning band in or out of the state of Michigan. This provided a pilot group that had beginning band experience from which to answer questions, but would not be potential survey participants since none of them currently taught beginning band in Michigan.

All seven members of the pilot survey group agreed to participate in the pilot survey prior to receiving the survey. The pilot survey group included three Michigan teachers who had taught beginning band in the past but currently did not, one Michigan teacher on maternity leave who taught beginning through high school band, and two non-Michigan teachers with beginning band experience.



The cover letters and pilot surveys were sent out during the second week of February, 2002. Pilot survey participants were asked to return surveys by the end of March. Of the seven participants, three responded to the pilot survey by filling it out and returning it or commenting on the content of the survey; four participants did not return the survey, in two cases because they felt they did not have the time after receiving the survey.

Based on the lack of response along with comments from returned surveys that the survey took too long to fill out and confusing to follow, several revisions were made. First, the survey was shortened considerably. In particular, most of the free response questions were eliminated. Second, the questions were reorganized to create a more logical flow to the questions and to eliminate any redundancy. Third, the scope of the survey was narrowed to focus primarily on the format of beginning band programs, with an emphasis on class size, frequency of class meetings and type of groupings for beginning band classes. Questions asking the participant to reflect of the effectiveness of their beginning band program formats were eliminated for two reasons. First, it seemed like such questions would be more appropriate in the focused interview portion of the research and second, the questions seemed to be leading and introducing a bias toward dissatisfaction with their current beginning band program.

In order to make this project successful, it was critical that this survey be simple to fill out and return, that it take very little time to do and that the topic be of interest to the participants. I noticed an increase in email surveys to Michigan band directors lately and I knew that I was not inclined to respond if the survey was long or of no interest to

me. One additional suggestion made by a pilot survey participant was to make my results known to the survey participants either with a mass email or a website for posting results. I agreed that this is a good idea and I planned to make the results available to all participants who replied to my survey.

### Email Survey

After the initial difficulties associated with the pilot survey, and its subsequent revision, the plan was still to use an email survey format to collect data from beginning band directors across the state of Michigan. However, there was another large obstacle to overcome. The original plan was to create the participant group for the survey from MSBOA membership records. While MSBOA was willing to provide a list of members from which to select participants, they did not have specific recommendations of band directors to contact. Furthermore, not all elementary members were known to them. Beginning band teachers who also teach middle or high school were listed in their membership directory and there was a small group of exclusively elementary members. However, teachers who teach only elementary beginning band often do not have MSBOA memberships since the programs offered through MSBOA are for middle and high school students. Thus, using their list made it difficult to find teachers in larger school districts where elementary band is separate from any middle or high school teaching positions. This would automatically influence the results, by making teachers whose beginning band formats are exclusively in elementary schools more difficult to include.

Therefore, because of the difficulties encountered during the pilot survey, the current increase in the use of email surveys and the inability to acquire a comprehensive

list of beginning band directors through MSBOA, the decision was made to abandon the survey format for this study. Instead, the method of data collection used was the focused interviews of selected teacher participants from a cross-section of beginning band programs. However, the experience of creating and conducting the pilot survey provided an invaluable background for creating the focused interview questions. The pilot survey helped to determine which questions would extract the most useful information from the interview process and also how those questions should be worded.

### Participants

The beginning band programs and teachers were selected based on the recommendation of their peers who teach in the same region of the state. These programs and directors are considered exemplary by their colleagues. Additionally, they were selected to provide a cross-section of program types including: school size, demographic and start year. Two programs begin in the fifth grade. One is a rural school district with a before school beginning band program. The second is a suburban school district with a more traditional elementary pull-out program during the school day. One program is transitioning between a fifth and a sixth-grade start. This is also a suburban school district. Two of the programs are middle school beginning band programs with a sixth-grade start. One of these is a suburban school district and the other is urban. All school districts included in this study are public and all of the teacher participants have at least ten years of beginning band teaching experience within their current school district.

## Procedure Detail

### Data Collection

The first step was to obtain permission from the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRHIS) to conduct the focused interviews (see Appendix D). Then, I conducted all of the focused interviews in person. The interviews were typically 35 to 55 minutes in length, depending on the length of the answers given by the teacher participants to each question. All of the interviews were conducted outside of the school day. Three of the interviews were conducted at the teacher participants' homes, one was conducted in my office and one was conducted at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. All interviews were recorded digitally on a Digital Speech Standard (DSS) recorder.

### Time Schedule

- |                      |                                    |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| • Summer 2001        | Thesis Proposal Meeting            |
| • Winter-Spring 2002 | Pilot Survey                       |
| • Summer 2002        | First Focused Interview            |
| • Spring 2003        | Second and Third Focused Interview |
| • Summer 2003        | Fourth and Fifth Focused Interview |

### Validity

The methods used to insure the validity of this study were member checks, my expertise in the field of beginning band (Patton, 1990), and extended time period of the study (Gall, J. P., M. D. Gall, & Borg 1999). Member checks were accomplished by sending a draft of the narrative was sent to the teacher participants. The teacher

participants reviewed the draft of their interview and provided clarifications as needed. These were then incorporated into the final interview narrative.

Throughout the interviews I relied on my expertise in beginning band programs comes from teaching four years of beginning band. This experience provided me with the necessary background and understanding of the unique demands of a beginning band program to be able to empathize with the teacher participants during their interviews. It also provided me with the ability to identify which techniques were successful, and which were not with greater ease than someone without beginning band experience would have.

Last, because the research was conducted over an extended period of time, from the fall of 2001 through the spring of 2003, I had the opportunity to reflect on and refine my ability to interpret the information on beginning bands.

### Analysis

In the summer of 2002, immediately after conducting the first focused interview, I reviewed the audio recording and took notes on answers given in the interview to my research questions. I then reviewed the interview recording and my notes again in order to summarize the interview into a concise narrative. This process was repeated exactly for each subsequent interview.

This procedure for analysis allowed me to draw information from the data that I might have missed had I waited to summarize the interviews until all five interviews were completed. I felt it was important to record not only what was said by the teacher participants, but also my impressions or “head notes” from the interview itself.

The five interview narratives were then analyzed for similarities and differences in and between cases. This procedure led to the categories discussed in the final chapter.

## Fifth-Grade Case Presentations

### Case 1

*Before school fifth-grade program with homogenous groupings.*

The program in this case is from a public school district in a rural northern lower Michigan community. The MSBOA classification (see Appendix E) for this school district fluctuates between a class B and class C depending on the year. The graduating senior-class averages 150 students, which is the cutoff between class B, and class C. The town is considered primarily “blue-collar” and the band program is very important for the school’s and the town’s identity.

Currently the junior high and high school are housed in one building and there are four elementary buildings. Three of the elementary schools are kindergarten through fourth grade, called “community schools” by the district. The fourth elementary school houses all of the fifth-grade and sixth-grade students. This configuration will change somewhat when the new high school building, currently under construction, opens. When that happens the junior high will become a seventh-grade and eighth-grade middle school and grades 9 through 12 will move to the high school. This is significant because it will affect band instruction at all levels. Currently all band classes are taught in the band room at the junior and senior high school building. When construction is complete there will be a band room at the middle school and one at the high school.

Elementary band begins in the fall of fifth grade. Students begin playing on their chosen instruments (rather than tonettes or recorders). Recruitment begins in the spring when the high school band comes and plays for the fourth graders. At that time, fourth

graders interested in starting an instrument fill out an interest form and are helped to select an instrument by representatives from a local music company who have been provided with the desired instrumentation. Beginning students may choose from flute, clarinet, cornet/trumpet, trombone and percussion. All other band instruments begin when students are switched during the second half of the sixth-grade year. Typically, the school provides these instruments to students (French horn, baritone, tuba, oboe, bassoon, saxophone).

There are two teachers responsible for beginning band instruction in this district. One delivers fifth-grade instruction and the other sixth-grade. The participant teacher interviewed is the sixth-grade instructor.

Over the past ten years, this program typically has started about 80 students in beginning band, though in three of the previous four years the numbers have been closer to 40. There is a new fifth-grade band director hired for this year. This beginning band program operates before the start of the elementary school day. Fifth-grade and sixth-grade band students ride the secondary school bus to the high school for band classes from 8:00 to 8:45am. They are then bussed back to their elementary building in time to start school at 9:00am. Even though students meet before the school day, the program is considered curricular by the district. In fifth grade students receive progress reports and in sixth grade they receive both progress reports and a grade. The advantages the teacher participant sees in this schedule configuration are that it is not a pull-out program and students are not missing other instruction in order to take band. Also, there is nothing else scheduled for elementary students at this time, so the only thing competing for their time



is sleeping-in. However, the biggest drawback to this system is that students have to come outside of the school day in order to participate in band. Because it takes this extra effort in order to take band and because students have to ride a bus with high school students, some students choose, or some parents choose, not to have their students participate. The teacher participant feels that there are some students who would enjoy band that are being missed and if band were scheduled in the school day, this might be avoided.

Attendance and retention of students is fairly high in this program. About two thirds of those who start band in fifth grade finish the year. And, of those two thirds who finish the year, most of them continue through high school. The teacher participant feels that this is very likely due to the fact that students have to make such an effort to be in band, that they are committed to continuing. Furthermore, because the students in band have to make an extra effort to be there, they are taking the class because they want to play music, and therefore there is very little trouble with discipline. Most of the attrition in fifth grade happens after the first six weeks, and most of them stop because they want to sleep-in. The teacher participant noted that this corresponds with the shortest days (latest sunrise) of the year.

The class groupings used in beginning band are varied. In fifth grade, students meet in like-instrument classes (homogenous grouping) once a week for 45 minutes. After the first six weeks, fifth graders meet once a week in their homogenous groups (with two being combined) and once a week in a full band (heterogeneous grouping). By the second semester, the fifth graders are meeting three times a week, once in instrument family

sectionals (brass, woodwind percussion) and twice in full band. In sixth grade they meet three to four times a week with three days of full band and one day of instrument family sectionals (which rotate woodwind, brass and percussion so that two groups have sectionals per week). The teacher participant likes this configuration for several reasons. First, it provides for like-instrument homogenous classes when students are just beginning so that they get a solid foundation in posture, hand position and tone production for their specific instrument. It also allows for a regular full band with heterogeneous grouping early on and this is what the students seem to enjoy the most. Furthermore, as the full band experiences increase in frequency, a somewhat homogenous grouping by instrument family takes the place of like-instrument classes, thereby providing a sectional situation where specifics of each instrument can be addressed. Another element of this schedule that the teacher participant likes is that it gradually increases the frequency of the classes, which the director feels makes it easier for the students to accept the early class time. They are able to gradually add on early days to their schedules rather than be asked to lose all of their “sleep-in” days at once.

I asked the teacher participant if there was anything that should be changed about the program and she said that the only thing she would do differently is to get the classes within the elementary school day so that students would not have to make extra effort to come to band. However, she would like to see the configuration of classes remain the same and without anything that would conflict for students scheduled at the same time. This may happen when the new high school opens. The school district is considering moving the start of the elementary school day back to 8:00am because they need to have

more minutes in a day according to the state. If this happens, the teacher participant and the elementary principal are working on a schedule that would have the current elementary program meet at the beginning of school. The students who are not in band would take a remedial class to help improve their Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) standardized test scores. The thought is that most students who take band would not feel they needed a remedial MEAP class and that students who would benefit from the remedial MEAP class are not the ones who usually succeed in band.

The current schedule was designed by the previous elementary principal whose chief reason for doing this, according to the director, was to simplify scheduling. Prior to this schedule, which has been used for more than ten years, fifth graders met only in like-instrument classes once a week in a pull-out program. Students often quit, not because they disliked band, but because they missed some of their other class and their grades would drop slightly. The teacher participant was not happy with that, or the absence of a full band experience, and the principal did not like the scheduling problems. The solution this principal came up with solved his scheduling problems and incorporated full band, thereby making both him and the teacher participant happy. The current principal is not as happy with the program, but according to the teacher participant, this is because the bus sometimes gets the band kids back to the elementary school a little late and the elementary teachers complain.

### Discussion

The format for this program is a mix of heterogeneous and homogenous, which combines the best of both worlds—like instrument instruction that facilitates rapid

learning without confusion, and full band that is fun for the kids and gets them used to the band sound. Furthermore, when like-instrument gives way to sectionals, at most two instruments are combined: flute/clarinet, cornet/trombone, and percussion. Another strength of this program is that percussionists learn mallets, snare, timpani and standard accessories and are required either to have a minimum of two years of piano or agree to take two years of piano concurrently.

It is also important to note that the teacher participant is happy with the configuration of this beginning band program and was instrumental in designing the current format. Furthermore, the format has been in place for several years and has been working well.

As the program currently stands, all students who wish to participate in band may choose to do so. However, if the 8:00am earlier start time is put into effect, some students, or their parents, may feel they would benefit more from the remedial MEAP class and they therefore would not be able to take band. It will be interesting to see if this potential conflict between the remedial MEAP class and band proves to be more or less of a conflict than the current one between sleeping -in and band.

## Case 2

*Fifth-grade pull-out in instrument family groupings during the school day.*

This case comes from a public school district in the western suburbs of the Detroit metropolitan area. There are three MSBOA class A high schools and four class B middle schools in the district along with 14 elementary school programs (housed in 13 different buildings). The teacher participant I interviewed has been teaching beginning

instrumental music in this district since 1987. Prior to that, he taught band and orchestra at one of the high schools.

This district uses a pull-out style program beginning in the fifth grade at the elementary schools. There are two, two-person teams responsible for delivering all beginning instrumental curriculum (both band and orchestra). Each team is responsible for half of the school district, or seven of the elementary school programs. The four teachers that make up these teams spend their entire day delivering beginning instrumental music. So there are four full-time beginning instrumental music positions. The format for their beginning program has remained the same for the past 12 years, since the district put into place the current music curriculum. Prior to that this district had a similar pull-out program, but without the team-teaching component.

There are a couple of characteristics of this program that make it somewhat unique among other beginning band programs that were stressed over and over again by the teacher participant. The first is that they do not really think in terms of beginning band and orchestra, rather in terms of beginning instrumental music. This lack of distinction serves to make the delivery of the beginning curriculum more collaborative and prevents the competition for students that is often seen between traditional band and orchestra programs. For this reason, I will refer to the teachers as instrumental music teachers rather than band or orchestra teachers. The second unique characteristic of this program is that all four beginning instrumental music teachers have time built into their regular teaching schedule for recruitment in the fourth grade that runs the entire school year. This appears

to contribute greatly to the overall success and the high recruitment and retention rates seen in this music program.

The average enrollment in fifth-grade instrumental music is between 205-255 in the band classes and over 400 total in beginning instrumental music for the half of the district for which this teacher is responsible. The other half of the district has nearly the same enrollment figures. These numbers have remained fairly consistent over the past several years. This translates into well over 90 % of fifth graders starting an instrument with about an 81% retention rate for the entire fifth-grade year.

Each instrumental music student in the fifth grade has two 40-minute classes a week. The students are grouped by instrument family. So, at each building there is a beginning woodwind class, a beginning brass class, a beginning percussion class and a beginning string class that meets twice a week. Because the teachers work in teams, one is responsible for the woodwind and brass classes, while one is responsible for the percussion and string classes. The major advantages to the two-person team is that they can have the homogenous groupings of instrument families (although the classes are heterogeneous within each instrument family) while reducing the overall time period in which the students are pulled out of their regular classes, thereby minimizing the disruption to the classroom teachers. Because between 80 and 90% of the fifth graders participate in instrumental music, there are very few students left in the classrooms during the two times a week students are pulled out for instrumental instruction. This system seems to be well-liked by the beginning instrumental music teachers, classroom teachers and administration alike.

For the majority of the school year, students meet in their instrument family classes. However, beginning in March the teachers will bring the woodwind, brass and percussion classes together for a full band experience while the strings remain separate. The focus of these meetings is to work on the end-of-the-year concert. The teachers have the flexibility to pull together the full band earlier in the year or to keep the instrument family groupings later in the year, but switching to full ensemble in March is the standard procedure.

During a typical week, each two-person team will travel to three elementary schools a day, teaching four sections of instrumental music during two periods at each school. So, each teacher has six beginning classes each day, Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, they teach beginning classes in the morning and use the afternoon for the fourth-grade recruitment program. The class sizes average between ten and 25 students per class for woodwind, brass and string classes and six to seven in each percussion class.

A major feature of this program is the fourth-grade recruitment that happens on Friday afternoons throughout the school year. Over the course of the school year, the fifth-grade beginning instrumental teachers will meet with the fourth graders in each school four times. For the first three of these meetings, they will meet with the entire fourth grade at each school all-together. During the first meeting they show a video about the different instrument choices available to students. During the second meeting they administer the Selmer Music Test. During the third meeting they demonstrate how to play each instrument offered in fifth grade. The instruments offered are: flute, oboe, clarinet, alto sax, cornet, French horn, trombone, baritone, mallet/snare, violin, viola, cello

and bass. For the fourth and final meeting with fourth graders, they meet with each class separately, rather than all fourth-grade classes in one school at the same time. This meeting is for the purpose of fitting instruments. Students are given an evaluation on each instrument they try, but the ultimate decision on what to play is left up to the individual student.

This beginning instrumental program has a long history of being successful. The teacher participant interviewed is very satisfied with the format of the program. He feels that its strengths come from the team-teaching component, both for the minimization of interruption for classroom teachers and for the instrument family groupings it affords. He also feels that the fourth-grade recruiting component is a strength. Prior to 1991 when this current format was instituted, the district used a fourth-grade pull-out program with only one teacher on each side of the district. This meant that students were only seen once a week, and the pull-out was much more intrusive because there were four periods of pull-out per building (one for each instrument family). Now that there are two teachers, the interruption time has been cut in half since two sections can be pulled out at once. Teachers also do not seem to mind the fact that students have two classes a week now that the duration of each interruption has been shortened. Furthermore, now that the start is in fifth grade, there is no interruption at the fourth-grade level.

Initially, he was worried that losing the fourth-grade start would hurt the music program, but in fact, the opposite has happened. He feels that starting with the slightly older fifth-grade student enables them to progress faster for a couple of reasons. First, they are bigger and stronger. This is particularly beneficial for the brass players and there



has been a marked increase in retention of brass students. Second, with a year more of maturity, the students pick up concepts faster and progress more quickly through the curriculum. Third, because recruiting happens in fourth grade, students can start instruments immediately in the fall. Before 1991, all recruiting had to be done in the beginning of the year and they lost at least two months of instruction time to instrument fitting.

This teacher had a hard time thinking of any drawbacks to the current system. The district, in collaboration with the music teachers and the music coordinator, has developed a system with which everyone is happy.

### Discussion

There are several elements of this otherwise fairly traditional pull-out program that make it unique. The first is the use of team-teaching, which allows for classes to be taught by instrument family, heterogeneous classes but homogeneous by family. The second is that team-teaching is used to minimize the interruption to the fifth-grade classes, thereby making the fifth-grade teachers happier. Third, there is a comprehensive recruiting program built into the fourth-grade curriculum and the beginning instrumental music teachers' teaching schedules, which the teacher participant feels helps with generating interest. Fourth, this school district is well set-up to provide instruments to students who need them, beyond the tradition provision of large instruments. They have a sizeable elementary inventory of flutes, clarinets, cornets, etc. This helps eliminate any economic factors that might prevent students from playing an instrument to begin with. And last, this program has the complete support of the music teachers, elementary

principals and classroom teachers, and district administration. There is an enormous  
commitment to furthering the arts that is district wide.

## Sixth-Grade Case Presentations

### Case 3

*Transitional program moving from fifth-grade elementary pull-out to sixth-grade middle school scheduled program.*

The program in this case is from a suburban public school district in the northwestern metropolitan area of Detroit. The district has two MSBOA classified AA high schools and a new class C high school, four middle schools and 15 elementary schools. Fourteen of the 15 elementary schools feed into a single middle school, while the fifteenth splits its population between two middle schools. The teacher participant interviewed has been teaching for 24 1/2 years in the public schools, the last 15 of which have been in this school district.

The beginning band program in this district has undergone some substantial changes in just the past two years. Until the 2002-2003 school year, students began instrumental music in the fifth grade using a pull-out program format twice a week. They have just switched to a sixth middle school class format where the beginning band classes will be part of the students' class schedule. The driving force behind this change, according to the teacher participant, was elementary teacher complaints that they did not have enough time to deliver the curriculum. She indicated that there was not a financial reason for the change in the program as all fifth-grade elementary band teaching positions have been retained and these teachers have been shifted to team-teaching positions in the sixth grades. I will describe this program in its new format with instruction beginning in

sixth grade and then I will present some of the teacher participant's opinions about the change.

There have been an average of 400 sixth graders enrolled in beginning band for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 across the entire district; about 100-125 per middle school. This represents about 50% of the total sixth-grade enrollment. This represents a decrease of about 25% in beginning band enrollment since the program moved from a fifth-grade to a sixth-grade start, but because of past attrition rates between fifth and sixth grade, the total sixth-grade enrollment numbers remain about the same.

Students in beginning band are scheduled in classes of about 50-60 students that meet daily for 42 minutes for the entire school year. There are two sections of beginning band that meet during the second and third hour class periods. In these middle schools, second and third hour are the "Encore" class blocks. Each class has heterogeneous grouping with some attempt made by the counselors to keep the instrumentation balanced for each class period. Otherwise, there are no other attempts made to control the instrumentation of each class period through scheduling practices (e.g. no woodwind, brass or percussion class).

Each beginning band class is team-taught at all four middle schools. In each pair of teachers, one is the primary teacher for the middle school for sixth through eighth grade and remains in the building. The other teacher is a traveling teacher who teaches sixth-grade beginning band at two middle schools. So, for the district, there are a total of six teachers involved in the beginning band program. (There is also a beginning orchestra program that is similarly structured with another six teachers). The teacher participant I

interviewed is one of the primary teachers at one of the middle schools. Her schedule is 33% beginning band, or two of the five classes that she teaches.

The team-teaching of each beginning band class allows the teachers increased flexibility in classroom format. This, coupled with the fact that in addition to the band room, they have a small ensemble room and access to the cafeteria, allows the freedom to divide the class in a variety of ways. For example, one teacher can teach the woodwinds in one room, while brass and percussion meet in another.

Currently, they start all band instruments from the beginning: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon (rarely), bass clarinet, alto sax, tenor sax, baritone sax, trumpet, French horn, trombone, baritone, tuba and percussion. Beginning next year, they will experiment with starting only flute, clarinet, trumpet and trombone in the first semester, then switching students to percussion in the second semester, and further diversifying at the end of the year. The instrument rental companies have agreed to transfer rental agreements for students switching to facilitate this. The hope is that this will make starting everyone in a heterogeneous classroom easier to manage for the teachers and students.

The teacher participant is concerned that by starting such a limited number of instruments, they will lose some students who would otherwise try band because the instrument they wish to play is not one of the choices available. However, since this format has not yet been tested, it will take a few years to see what sort of impact either the sixth-grade start or the limited choice of instruments will have on the overall beginning band program.

The ideal situation with the sixth-grade start, according to this director, would be to have students scheduled into a woodwind section and a brass/percussion section for the first semester and then at the semester when all the Encore classes change, they could be redistributed to balanced full band classes by ability. She feels this would best address the need to start students on their instruments with others playing instruments from the same family. It would not be exactly homogenous grouping, but with team-teaching, flutes and double reeds could be separated from single reed instruments during one class period, and brass and percussion could be separated during the other class period. Then, once students have a foundation in the fundamentals of their instruments, they could be moved to a more heterogeneous full band grouping. These could also be separated into two groups by ability, although this would not be done overtly, so as to put students with others who are moving at a similar pace. She feels this would best address the needs of each student.

This teacher participant is still somewhat concerned about losing the fifth-grade beginning program. In spite of the fact that the beginning program is going from a pull-out to a scheduled class and from twice a week to daily, both of which she sees as improvements, she is very concerned about delaying contact with the students. The elementary fifth-grade students do not have as many demands on their time as the middle school sixth-grade students do. They also do not have as many other choices, such as art, foreign language, etc., competing for their participation during the same time block. She is worried that many students who would otherwise play an instrument, will lose the opportunity to start because they are pulled in too many directions.

## Discussion

The interesting feature of this program is that it has been a successful fifth-grade program for many years and is in the process of switching to a sixth-grade program. The teacher participant has many concerns, that seem similar to the concerns posed by the teacher participants in the second and fourth case studies when their programs moved from a fourth to a fifth and a fifth to a sixth-grade program, respectively. In both of those cases, when the teacher participants look back on their programs, they are quite happy with the changes and would not choose to go back to the earlier start year.

My perception of what is happening in this case is that if they would like fewer instruments in one classroom at a time, this could be easily addressed by scheduling one class of woodwind players and another of brass and percussionists. This way, perhaps more instruments could be offered from the beginning and with team-teaching, could still be more easily broken down. Based on what I learned about their Encore blocks, there are not any extenuating circumstances preventing them from scheduling students this way other than the counselors' unwillingness.

It will be interesting to see what happens to this program in the long run. I wonder if the teacher participant's concerns will pan out. I have seen many successful sixth-grade programs, and my background leads me to worry less about losing the fifth-grade start having come from a successful sixth-grade beginning program. However, this change in program format was not driven by the music teachers in the district, and they do not seem comfortable with it. Their satisfaction with the program format is crucial to its success.

#### Case 4

*Sixth-grade beginning band program in a middle school setting with scheduled class periods.*

This case comes from a largely urban public school district in West Michigan. This program begins band in sixth grade at the middle schools. There are two class B and one class A middle schools that feed into a single AA high school. There are ten kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary schools with an eleventh under construction, the middle schools are sixth through eighth grade and the high school is ninth through twelfth grade with the freshman campus separated from grades 10 through 12.

There are three directors responsible for delivering beginning band instruction. Beginning band makes up half of each of their teaching schedules. They typically start 325-350 sixth graders in beginning band, with 100-125 at each middle school. These numbers have remained fairly constant for several years. The district moved from fifth grade to sixth grade for beginning band about nine years ago. According to the teacher participant I interviewed, this increased the number of beginners in the program, but at the time they did notice a decrease in overall playing ability at the middle schools as a result.

The teacher participant I interviewed is at one of the two class B middle schools. His enrollment of about 100 beginners each fall, when combined with the additional 35 to 40 beginning string numbers, equals about two thirds of the sixth grade. All sixth graders are required to take a yearlong music elective, either band, orchestra, choir or general music. There is some attrition in the first month of beginning band where some students



elect to drop band in favor of general music. However, the students are strongly encouraged to play an instrument for the entire year, and most of them stay for the year. In fact, after the first month of class, there is little attrition for the rest of middle school. Typical numbers in each grade level are 100 sixth graders, 78 seventh graders and 70 eighth graders.

The beginning band classes meet for a scheduled 55-minute class period on an every other day basis (due to changes in the building schedule, these will be 43-minute periods beginning next year). There are two class hours devoted to sixth-grade electives, and each sixth grader chooses four elective classes, one of them a music class. This allows for four section of sixth-grade band to be offered at each middle school. Classes are divided into like-instrument, or homogenous, groupings. There is one class period that is smaller, averaging 10 to 20 students per class and these are offered opposite the string classes. The second class period is larger, averaging 30 students. These classes are team-taught with one of the directors from another middle school. The typical instrument grouping for these classes are: a flute/oboe class opposite the low brass class for the smaller section and clarinets/saxes and percussion opposite French horns and trumpets in the larger sections. The larger sections are then split clarinets/saxes with one teacher, percussion with the other and French horns and trumpets likewise in order to maintain the homogenous grouping. The directors involved consider the team-teaching of the larger sections critical to the success of the program. It permits the homogenous groupings, allows for some individualized attention for students who are struggling and also provides much needed collaboration. The three teachers involved have been working together for a

long time and are very close-knit and supportive of each other. They have worked hard to keep this team teaching in place, but are worried it will be eliminated for either budgeting or scheduling concerns. They had to fight to keep it from being eliminated this past year in favor of having each of them teach some sort of non-music related enrichment class at their home building. The main objection from administration, according to the band director, was that with the traveling involved, the music classes drove the master schedule for each middle school.

The way the team teaching works is that each director teaches two class periods daily or four sections total of beginning band in his or her own school and then travels to one of the other middle schools to team-teach an additional period or two sections. Currently, the music classes at each of the three middle schools have to be coordinated so as to facilitate this “round-robin” approach to team-teaching.

The instruments offered in the sixth grade are: flute, oboe, clarinet, alto sax (on a very limited basis), trumpet, French horn, trombone, baritone, tuba and percussion. Percussionists learn both mallets and snare and are strongly encouraged to have at least two years of piano background. Students meet in their homogenous groupings during all class periods, and a Sixth-grade Band Club meets for full band rehearsals five or six times throughout the school year in order to prepare a February and a spring concert. The director is not allowed to require attendance, but because of the extra credit incentives and expectations set out, few students miss these full band “club” meetings.

The beginning band program is organized into these basically homogenous groupings on an alternating schedule primarily to fit in with the middle school elective

program. There is no ability grouping considered. In order to maintain the homogenous groupings of instruments and a balance of all elective class sizes, the sections are sometimes rotated into different spots in the schedule. (For example, the baritones might get grouped with the trumpets one year instead of with the trombones).

The greatest strength of the program, according to the teacher participant, is the team-teaching component because it facilitates collaboration between directors and allows for better homogeneity in the larger class sections. It is the reason, he feels, the program remains so successful and is part of the reason that he fights so hard to keep it from being eliminated. The greatest weakness is that kids are lost due to lack of parent support or due to the cost of renting an instrument. To combat the latter, the school routinely provides baritones, tubas and French horns. There is also a growing collection of other instruments to help students without the financial means to rent their own instrument. The goal is to provide the opportunity for all students to participate in band if they wish, regardless of socio-economic status.

This school district is a mostly urban school district, and as such, has experienced a change in demographics over the past 10 years. As more of the students come from less affluent homes, there seems to have been a corresponding drop in parental support for the students, not so much in participating in band as for staying motivated and keeping up the practice. This director feels that some of the changes to the program, such as increasing the number of school instruments and moving to a sixth-grade start along with changes in teaching strategies have helped maintain the quality of the program. The ideal program, according to this director, would be to have greater contact time with the

students and teaming every hour. Specifically, he would like to see four class periods a week of homogenous classes and one period of full band. However, this would be unrealistic in the current elective schedule. He feels that they have a good program as it currently stands and would like to see it continue.

### Discussion

There seem to be three key factors that support the continuing success of this program. The first is the team-teaching approach. This allows for collaboration between teachers and the homogeneity of instrumentation in the larger classes, which is the second key factor. Third, there is frequent, consistent, scheduled contact time that is not interrupted since beginning band is a scheduled class.

The biggest concerns for this program are the need to schedule any full band, heterogeneous groupings after the school day and the concern that the team-teaching element might be removed by the administration in order to keep each teacher full-time in one building. The goal behind this is both financial and for the purposes of easier scheduling.

### Case 5

*Scheduled sixth-grade program in a "junior/middle" sixth-grade-only building.*

This case comes from a suburban public school district in West Michigan. This school district has one MSBOA classified AA high school and a class A seventh and eighth grade middle school. The beginning band program starts in the sixth grade. All sixth graders in the district are in one building, a junior middle school with just sixth graders.

There are six kindergarten through fifth-grade elementary schools and one kindergarten through second-grade elementary school.

All sixth graders in this school district are required to take a music class. The choices available to them have changed slightly over the past several years. Originally, students could choose between playing a band instrument and a choir/general music type class. Two years ago, a string program was added and students could choose between band, orchestra or the choir/general music class. This past year, the choir and general music class was separated, so now sixth grader may choose band, orchestra, choir or general music. Because of these changes, there has been a decrease in the number of students signing up for beginning band classes. Three year ago, they started 278 students. When the orchestra program was added, this dropped to 226 students, and the projected enrollment for next year is 206. However, if one combines the number of students signed up for any instrument by combining the band and orchestra numbers, there are actually substantially more students playing an instrument. For the 2003-04 school year the beginning band and orchestra teachers project nearly 360 instrumental music students in beginning band and orchestra. Also, although it is really too soon to tell how the decreased band enrollment will affect the middle school band numbers, it appears that while fewer students opt to play a band instrument in sixth grade, fewer of the ones who do play a band instrument in sixth grade quit playing at the semester or the end of the school year. Therefore, it appears that the numbers going into seventh-grade band will remain fairly constant.

The teacher participant I interviewed is one of three teachers responsible for sixth-grade beginning band instruction. He splits his teaching between the high school and the sixth grade. This makes beginning band two fifths of his teaching schedule. This is the same schedule as one of the other beginning band teachers has. The third teacher teaches two fifths sixth-grade band and three fifths elementary general music.

Sixth-grade beginning band is part of the Encore curriculum that is taught from 12:30-2:30pm each afternoon in four, half-hour time slots. The schedule is divided so that each beginning band teacher has four sections of beginning band each day for a half hour and these alternate on a Monday-Wednesday and Tuesday-Thursday schedule. Therefore, each teacher teaches a total of eight sections of beginning band with 24 sections of beginning band total for the program. These beginning band sections are scheduled opposite the other Encore classes, and all students will take four Encore classes during their Encore periods. On Fridays, students will attend a heterogeneous rehearsal with the other beginning band sections that meet at the same time alternating with a “Free Friday” activity on the opposite Friday. This means that over a ten-day period, band students will have five band classes.

The 24 beginning band sections are divided into homogenous, like-instrument sections. The goal is to have about ten students per section, although this can vary greatly due to scheduling. Students may choose to play flute, oboe, bassoon, clarinet, alto sax, trumpet, French horn, trombone, baritone, tuba or percussion and are placed in beginning band classes by the instrument they choose to play. However, their placement is also affected by which “team” they belong to for their Core classes. Certain teams have their

Encore classes at given times. This sometimes means that students' instrument choices are limited by when the different instrument sections are offered. However, this only presents problems with some of the more specialty instruments such as French horn and oboe where there may only be one beginning band section offered. Occasionally there are classes where two or more instruments are combined, such as trombone, baritone and tuba or clarinet and alto sax, but this is not done the majority of the time, and then is only done with standard instrument combinations.

All beginning band students will get one heterogeneous, full band-like class every two weeks. Students are assigned to their full band with the other students who have class on the same day. There is no ability grouping in the full band classes. They are based entirely on the schedule. In addition to these Friday classes, students are occasionally grouped into smaller heterogeneous groupings with others who take band during the same Encore class period. Since all there teachers teach in the afternoons, there are three sections of beginning band offered at any one time. The mixing of these classes is done primarily to cover when one of the teachers is ill, although they can choose to combine for other reasons.

The greatest strengths of this beginning band program, according to the teacher participant are the homogenous classes, the consistency of the class meeting times, and the long tradition of a strong music program in this school district. He feels that all of these factors lead to why they are successful. The greatest weakness is the complexity of the scheduling. He feels that this is getting more and more complicated, largely because students' placement on Core teams is becoming more and more specialized. This makes it

harder to schedule the different band instrument sections without sacrificing the homogenous groupings. He says there is pressure from administration to make this easier, either by changing how students are grouped, or by eliminating a beginning band teacher. However, as long as the beginning band program is locked into this Encore schedule with only two hours of instructional time allotted, then delivering instruction with two teachers rather than three would decrease the flexibility in the schedule, not increase it.

However, he would not be opposed to having beginning band be delivered by two teachers, or even one if the time period over which it could be delivered were lengthened. In many ways, he sees this as increasing the consistency in the pedagogy between sections because fewer people would be involved. In their current set up, the three teachers delivering beginning band instruction have no time to collaborate and they have three different teaching styles. This brings some inconsistencies into the program. What he does not want to lose is the homogenous grouping of instruments for the program overall.

A large part of why this program is so successful, according to this teacher participant, is its tradition. This program has been strong for a long time, not just in beginning band, but also all the way through high school. This tradition brings an understanding of what it means to participate in band. Therefore they are able to set high expectations and contributes to their success.

### Discussion

This sixth-grade program has many factors in common with the others programs studied. These are: homogenous groupings, frequent opportunities for heterogeneous full



band meetings, consistent uninterrupted class meeting times, a high level of teacher satisfaction with the structure of the program and team-teaching, or at least, multiple teachers delivering instruction thereby increasing flexibility in the scheduling. However, unlike the other programs that see the team-teaching as an asset, the teacher participant in this program is less sure of that. His main concern is that by having multiple teachers deliver instruction, there is less consistency in delivery and pedagogical style, which leads to problems. It seems that a large part of this is due to the fact that there is no collaboration time built into this schedule for the beginning band teachers. He also feels that one of the three teachers is not a particularly strong teacher, and her students suffer as a result. He feels that the program would be stronger if one teacher could teach all of the sixth-grade beginning band sections, provided that the homogenous groupings could be maintained.

This teacher participant also emphasized the importance that tradition plays in the success of this beginning band program. He believes that the tradition of having a strong music program in the district allows the teachers to set higher expectations for student achievement without opposition from parents or administration. Many current students have parents who also went through the music program in this school district, and they therefore support the high expectations for students that come out of the music program, even at the beginning band level. This also means that many of the parents know what is needed to be successful in music and reinforce what is taught at school in the beginning band classes at home.

## Cross-Case Results and Conclusion

It was the intent of this study to provide information for band directors and administrators to use when designing and implementing beginning band programs. The results of this study help outline possible beginning band formats, including instrument groupings, class sizes and meeting frequencies, which are effective. Additionally, the results of this study provide researchers with a basis for further study into beginning band programs and instrumentation groupings for ensemble classes in music education.

### Cross-Case Examination

All of the participant teachers interviewed teach in beginning band programs considered exemplary by their peers. In examining the different programs they seem to have several factors in common. These are: (a) the satisfaction of the teachers involved with the program format, (b) the ability to group a large percentage of the instruction homogenously, (c) the existence of a heterogeneous full band experience, (d) team-teaching, (e) frequent, consistent, uninterrupted contact times with students for the entire first year, (f) full-year participation of the majority of students. It appears that these are characteristics needed for successful beginning band programs.

The teacher participants also seemed to have similar concerns regarding their programs' continued success. These seemed to center around the fear that certain aspects of their programs, specifically team-teaching, amount of contact time, or ability to control the instrument grouping would be reduced due to scheduling or budget concerns. All of these factors were considered crucial to the success of each program.

I think perhaps the most important component of a beginning band program, as has been indicated so far in all of these cases, is the teacher's and the administration's happiness with the program format. This appears to be at least as important, if not more important than the particular format used.

It also appears that the format that works best depends on whether the beginning band program is in an elementary or a middle school setting. Programs that start in the sixth grade in the middle schools lend themselves more easily to more homogenous groupings and more frequent contact time because of the ease of fitting the classes within the master schedule at the middle school. The elementary programs do better with homogenous groupings by instrument family, which leads to a heterogeneous grouping within each family in a pullout format with usually fewer contacts per week because the scheduling difficulties of like instrument classes are too severe.

It is important to note that none of these programs use an exclusively heterogeneous grouping of all instruments together. Instead they use a mix of homogenous and heterogeneous groupings to provide both the instruction specific to each instrument and the full ensemble experience. They also tend to move from homogenous to heterogeneous as students develop their skills.

### Recommendations

Five formats possible for beginning band programs have been presented here. Further research in this area is needed. There is little, if any, research into the perspective of beginning band programs from the administrator's and counselors point of view. A large part of what drives the format for beginning band programs seems to be the school

type, elementary or middle school, and the scheduling concerns related to the school format. For this reason, it would be helpful to conduct research with school counselors and administrators, perhaps also in a focused interview format. Special care would have to be used by the interviewer, particularly if he or she has a music background, in order to collect information not biased in favor of the music programs. I suspect the budget and scheduling concerns play a large role in how they feel about the format of music programs, whatever their personal feelings about the intrinsic worth of beginning band classes are.

In the process of completing this study on beginning band formats, it became clear that scheduling and school type (elementary or secondary) influence the grouping structures and overall designs of beginning band programs much more than I anticipated. There has been some research into scheduling concerns for music classes. The Music Educators National Conference (MENC) has published a guide entitled Scheduling Time for Music (1995) that addresses many scheduling concerns, including how music can fit into a middle school schedule. Any further research into beginning program design should examine the impact of scheduling, specifically how an elementary school or middle school schedule affects overall program design.

It is interesting to note that while students starting in the sixth-grade programs have less overall experience playing their instruments by the time they reach seventh grade, it does not mean that their skill level is substantially less. According to Hartley (1996), “research has overwhelmingly concluded that by the time they reach junior high

level (Grade 7 or 8), students who began study in sixth grade are able to perform similarly to those who began in earlier grades.” Furthermore, Hartley states that,

instrumental music programs that met daily had less attrition than those that met two or three times per week. Therefore, if the number of times of instruction per week is affected by starting grade, this could be another factor to consider in selecting the proper grade level for beginning band training (p. 505).

This study did not look at the influence of the program design on the students’ musical and technical proficiency in later grades, or on retention, though some of the teacher participants referred to it. However, this would be a valuable area for future research. A good source from which to start research into this area would be the literature review by Delzell and Doerksen (1998). This review surveys a variety of studies which directly or indirectly examine beginning instrumental music programs from the perspective of starting grade level, including how starting grade level influences retention rates and technical proficiency.

Additionally, there are not any quantitative studies that survey larger numbers of beginning band programs. There are many avenues for research using quantitative models to discover the influence of the common variables for successful beginning band programs seen in this study (teacher satisfaction, homogenous and heterogeneous grouping flexibility, team-teaching, frequent uninterrupted contact time and full year participation of students) on retention, attrition, rate of progress or other measures of success for beginning band programs.



This study focused on beginning band programs in Michigan. However, further research into beginning band program formats in other states would also serve to broaden the understanding of different formatting possibilities. This is an area of research that has received very little attention, at least in terms of formalized research. Further study would be highly beneficial to music teachers, building administrators and counselors and school districts alike.

### Conclusion

Completing this study has had an enormous impact on my understanding of what makes up a successful beginning band program. In many respects, it has helped clarify for me elements that are critical to the success of any beginning band program. Although I no longer teach in the district I did when this project began and I no longer teach beginning band, I have benefited greatly from the process of studying successful beginning band programs in depth. Most importantly, I am much more knowledgeable about the complexities of designing and implementing beginning band programs.

## APPENDICIES



## APPENDIX A

### Survey Questions

## APPENDIX A

### Survey Questions

#### **Survey of Beginning Band Programs in Michigan**

##### Directions

1. To fill out the survey, use the "reply to sender" function of your email program that allows you to include the original text. Then write your responses with in the body of the original e-mail.
2. Please respond to all questions as completely as possible. This survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey.

##### Survey Questions

##### Factual Data

1. Would you classify your school district as urban, suburban, or rural?
2. Is your school district public, private or charter?
3. What is the MSBOA classification of the schools in your district?
4. How many elementary schools are in your district?
5. How many Middle Schools/Jr. High Schools are in your district?
6. How many High Schools are in your district?

##### Enrollments/Scheduling

1. What is the total enrollment for your beginning band program each year for the past three years?

2001/2002:

2000/2001:

1999/2000:

2. In what grade do you start your beginning band program?
3. Is your beginning band program run in:
  - a) A K-4 elementary school
  - b) A K-5 elementary school
  - c) A K-6 elementary school
  - d) A 5/6 elementary school
  - e) A 6-8 middle school
  - f) A 7-9 jr. high school
  - g) Some other configuration (please specify)
2. How many sections of beginning band do you teach?
3. Is your entire teaching schedule beginning band?
4. If you answered “no” to number 3, please specify how many periods of beginning band you teach and what makes up the rest of your teaching schedule.
5. Are you the only beginning band teacher in your program?
6. If you answered “no” to number 5, please specify how many beginning band teachers are in your program and the number of periods they teach beginning band.
7. Do(es) your beginning class(es) meet during the regular school day?
8. Is/Are your class(es) part of the master schedule or are they on a “pull out” basis?  
Please elaborate as needed.
9. How often do(es) your beginning class(es) meet in a week?
10. How long are your class periods?
11. What is your beginning class size? If you have several sections, please provide the average class size.
12. How many sections of beginning band are offered?

13. Does your school have a beginning strings program?

### GROUPING

1. Would you describe your beginning band class(es) as heterogeneous (completely mixed instrumentation), grouped by instrument family (brass, woodwind, percussion), homogenous (like instrument classes) or something else (please describe).
2. What band instruments are offered during the first year of instruction?
3. Do your students meet as a full band:
  - a) some of the time
  - b) all of the time
  - c) never
4. If you answered “some of the time” in number 2, please specify how often they meet as a full band.
5. If you have more than one section of beginning band, please describe how placement in different classes is determined (instrumentation, schedule, ability, other).
6. Please use the space below to add any additional information you feel is necessary to further explain the format of your beginning band program.

## APPENDIX B

### Cover Letter for Email Survey

## APPENDIX B

### Cover Letter for Email Survey

January, 2002

Margaret E. Babcock  
44725 Yorkshire Dr.  
Novi, MI 48375  
(248) 344-0140

Dear Participant (person's name will be used):

I am conducting a study that will look at the different instrument groupings used for beginning band programs in the state of Michigan. My interest in this subject stems from my four years of teaching experience in beginning band. The purpose of this study is to provide information to band directors in Michigan about what different beginning band program designs are used across the state, and what program designs work better than others.

In order to complete this study I will be sending an email survey to select beginning band directors in Michigan for them to complete and return over email. The survey should take about fifteen minutes to complete. You have been selected to participate in this study. If you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate this by replying to this email message. If you do not wish to be included in this study, please reply to this email message stating that you are not interested, and I will not contact you again for the study.

At no time in the reporting on this study will your name be used. All responses will be confidential.

I look forward to your response and I hope you will consider participating in my study. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact me via email or telephone.

Sincerely,

Margaret E. Babcock

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Interview Questions for Beginning Band Programs in Michigan**

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions for Beginning Band Programs in Michigan

#### Factual Data

1. Would you classify your school district as urban, suburban, or rural?
2. Is your school district public, private or charter?
3. What is the MSBOA classification of the schools in your district?
4. How many elementary schools are in your district?
5. How many Middle Schools/Jr. High Schools are in your district?
6. How many High Schools are in your district?

#### Enrollments/Scheduling

1. What is the total enrollment for your beginning band program each year for the past three years?
  - a. 2001/2002:



b. 2000/2001:

c. 1999/2000:

2. In what grade do you start your beginning band program?
3. What type of school configuration do you have for beginning band (elementary, MS, JRHS etc)
4. How many sections of beginning band do you teach?
5. Is your entire teaching schedule beginning band? If not, what percentage of your schedule is beginning band and what else do you teach?
6. Are you the only beginning band teacher in your program? If not, how many beginning band teachers are there and how much of their schedules is beginning band?
7. When do your beginning band classes meet?
8. Is/Are your class(es) part of the master schedule or are they on a “pull out” basis?
9. How often do(es) your beginning class(es) meet in a week? Do you always meet in the same configurations?
10. How long are your class periods?

11. What is your beginning class size? If you have several sections, please provide the average class size.
12. How many sections of beginning band are offered?
13. Does your school have a beginning strings program?

### GROUPING

1. Would you describe your beginning band class(es) as heterogeneous (completely mixed instrumentation), grouped by instrument family (brass, woodwind, percussion), homogenous (like instrument classes) or something else (please describe).
2. What band instruments are offered during the first year of instruction?
3. How often do your students meet as a full band? Do you ever meet in other combinations?
4. If you have more than one section of beginning band, please describe how placement in different classes is determined (instrumentation, schedule, ability, other).
5. What are the reasons behind why your beginning band program is organized in this manner?
6. What are the strengths and weaknesses to your beginning band schedule?
7. What, if any, changes would you make to your beginning band program, and why?
8. Are there any additional characteristics of your program that I have neglected to ask that you feel are pertinent?

## APPENDIX D

### Participant Consent Form

## APPENDIX D

### Participant Consent Form

Master's Thesis topic:

*Instrumental Grouping Options for Beginning Band Programs in Michigan.*

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your involvement with a successful beginning band program. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed either in person, or by telephone about the format of your beginning band program. Interviews will take approximately 20-30 minutes. With your permission, interviews will be taped. If you do not wish your interview to be taped, or if your interview is by telephone, written notes will be used instead. Prior to completion of the project, you will be given the chance to review your responses for accuracy. Your name and the name of your school district will not be used at any time in this study. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Peggy Babcock by mail: 44725 Yorkshire Dr., Novi, MI 48375, by phone: (248) 344-0140, or email: [bonebottle@aol.com](mailto:bonebottle@aol.com). If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact—anonynously, if you wish—Ashir Kumar, MD, Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email: [ucrihs@msu.edu](mailto:ucrihs@msu.edu), or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

---

(signature)

---

(print name)

**UCRIHS APPROVAL FOR  
THIS project EXPIRES:**

**JAN 20 2004**

**SUBMIT RENEWAL APPLICATION  
ONE MONTH PRIOR TO  
ABOVE DATE TO CONTINUE**

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association Classification System**

## APPENDIX E

### Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association Classification System

#### **MSBOA FIRST GROUP CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM**

A FIRST GROUP IS THE ENSEMBLE THAT HAS THE HIGHEST GRADE PRESENT  
READ FROM COLUMN SHOWING TOP GRADE LEVEL PRESENT

Average Grade Enrollment		11	10	9		MS/JRHS	9	8	7
400-499.9	AA	A	B	C		275-499.9	AA	A	B
250-399.9	A	B	C	D		200-274.9		A	B
150-249.9	B	C	D			125-199.9		B	C
90-149.9	C	D				50-124.9		C	D
0-89.9	D					0-49.9	D		

MSBOA CLASSIFICATION EXAMPLE (HIGH SCHOOL)	MSBOA CLASSIFICATION EXAMPLE (MS/JRHS)
A. Total number of grades present in the group (10,11,12)	A. Total number of grades present in the group (2)
B. Total FTE number in those grades in the entire school equals 615.	B. Total FTE number in the entire school equals 205. Count students in 7 <sup>th</sup> grade and up.
C. "B" divided by "A"	C. "B" divided by "A"
Example: $615 \div 3 = 205$ (Your average enrollment)	Example: $205 \div 2 = 102$ (Your average enrollment)
205 in 12 column (top grade present in ensemble) is Class B.	102 in 8 column (top grade present in ensemble) is Class D.
If the three grades present were 9,10,11, 205 in the 11 column would be Class C.	

1. Total the number of FTE students in the school and divide by total number of grades present in school. This determines your average enrollment.
2. Referring to the chart above, find the vertical column showing the highest grade level present in this band or orchestra.
3. A group consisting of ninth graders only may enter either Middle School/Junior or Senior High.

Second groups are allowed to enter no more than two (2) classifications below the established classification for any school, third and fourth groups may enter at any classification.

#### **Junior/Senior Classification:**

1. A Class D school in which members meet daily as a combined junior/senior band, and is the only performing group in the school.
2. A Class D school that has an enrollment of 30 or less per grade, in which junior and senior bands meet in the same building during different hours. In this situation, a director may choose to combine the performing groups once a week for rehearsals and enter them as a combined junior/senior ensemble.
3. Groups Participating as "Junior /Senior" Groups:
  - a. Select from the class D High School Basic Music List.
  - b. Sight-read: At District\*\*\* Class A-B Junior High  
At State \*\*\* Class C-D High School from District Festival

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