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Teachers' Perspectives about Infusing Music into Language Arts Instruction

Demetria Lucille Thomas
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Walden University

College of Education

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Demetria Thomas

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2014

Abstract

Teachers' Perspectives about Infusing Music into Language Arts Instruction

by

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MS Ed, Mercy College, 2002

BS, North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, 1985

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2014

Abstract

Reading and writing curricula in more than 50% of America's schools have not been successful in assisting students to meet mandated academic performances for a number of reasons, including lack of student motivation and self-esteem. Research studies indicated that music can influence student motivation and academic performance in subjects such as language arts and that a music-infused curriculum could generate the positive difference between academic failure and academic success. For this qualitative case study with a constructivist paradigm, the purpose was to observe, document, and analyze music-infused lessons used by 4 teachers from prekindergarten to 5th grade with the goal to enhance students' language arts skills. The study examined teachers' perspectives and the instructional tools they used to stimulate and motivate students to strive toward academic success. It included interviews, a focus group, and observations with the participants. Data were coded, transcribed, analyzed, and evaluated for the final documented results, which revealed the benefits teachers experienced and the positive changes they noticed in their students from using music infusion in language arts. Findings revealed that students were more motivated, exhibited better attitudes, and had sustained attention and better retention of lessons taught with a music-infused structure. A recommendation is that administrators allow teachers more opportunities and flexibility to collaborate and assist with developing music-infused lessons to align with their language arts curriculum. Overall, the implications for social change were significant for educators, administrators, and students by providing an alternative method to teaching language arts that can increase motivational levels and academic success of struggling students

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Dedication

“To God be the Glory for the Things He has done!” I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my dear and loving family who gave me consistent support and prayers throughout this academic journey. To my amazing mother Johnsie W. Thomas. Thank you for your unyielding encouragement and motivating force that pushes me to continue to reach for the top in all that I do. To my awesome sister Adrienne L. Thomas for always believing in me and expecting me to do nothing less than the best. To my fantastic nephews Tyler Thomas Harper and Elijah Thomas Harper, and my niece Jada Thomas Harper, my cheerleaders through all of the time consuming days. I must also thank my family of “Angels, smiling over the balconies of Heaven,” especially my dad, the late Edgar W. Thomas. From the beginning of this program I began to remember how there was not one day in my life that you and mom did not remind me that there was nothing I could not accomplish once I set my mind to it. I truly miss you and my heart knows just how proud you are of me. You all have been a blessing in my life and I love you.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2002), the federal government has placed increased focus on student performance levels. The National Education Association (2009) reported nationwide increases in the number of schools not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards. AYP was implemented, with NCLB, as an assessment tool used to gauge student achievement on statewide assessments in the subject areas of mathematics and language arts in schools servicing students in Grades 4, 7, and 10. The results from these mandated statewide standardized examinations in language arts and mathematics are used as conclusive evidence to determine student and school academic-performance success levels. As a means to address the decline, this law mandated that each state's education department develop and enforce programs that meet state standards and better address the needs of students with low performance levels.

AYP requires that by the year 2014 all schools meet a proficiency level of 100% in language arts and mathematics. However, based on information from the National Education Association (2009), 75–99% of U.S. schools will have failed to meet the mandated proficiency. Statistical information in the New York City Department of Education (2010) indicated that students in the low-income, minority community in the upper Manhattan region of New York City did not meet expected standard performance levels compared to students in other parts of the United States. This failure was most evident in the content areas of reading and writing; these students were two to three

grades below the level of expectation. D'Agrosa (2008), Gupta (2006), and Costa-Giomi (2004) are among researchers who have linked poor student performance levels to low self-esteem, lack of focus, and lack of motivation to learn. Student learning environments should engage methods and strategies that allow for more creative, flexible, and less rigid curriculum. "This type of environment motivates and stimulates the learner" (Jensen, 2008, p. 5).

Since the early 1900s, advocates supporting the effect of music on learning have suggested that involvement with and exposure to music can serve as a catalyst for improving children's academic achievement (Project Zero, 1967). According to Morrison (1994), one of the earliest assertions advocating the importance of music in education was made by Will Earhart, President of the Music Supervisors National Conference in 1919. Earhart (as cited in Morrison, 1994) stated, "Music enhances knowledge in the areas of mathematics, science, geography, history, language arts, physical education, and vocational training" (p. 1). Nevertheless, legislators have significantly cut local and national arts programs in order for schools to allot more time and money for students to meet the academic performance expectations in language arts and mathematics (Arts Count Initiative, 2008).

New York City's Department of Education has led the nation by creating the Arts Count Initiative (2006), which was designed to provide a greater accountability for arts education in schools. The Office of the Arts and Special Projects (2009) budget reported that 98% of elementary schools received music instruction; however, the instruction was augmented through cultural organizations or classroom teachers and only 12% of the

instruction received was from an arts specialist. Many researchers supported the inclusion of the arts in education curricula (Catterall, 2002; Flohr, 2006, 2010, 2011; Hoo Lum, 2008; Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2006; Vaughn & Winner, 2000; Waterhouse, 2006). They argued that this inclusion creates an ability to stimulate and focus the learner, as the arts enrich the classroom learning environment.

Vaughn and Winner (2000) suggested that, based on data from 1987 to 1998 on SAT scores, “students who have been able to study the arts are steadily higher academic achievers than students who do not study the arts” (pp. 77–89). As stated in the Annual Arts in Schools Report (2009-2010), U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan affirmed the “importance of including the arts as a core academic subject in order for students to receive a complete education” (p. 83). Flohr (2006, 2010) stated that music has the ability to enrich all the core subjects taught to children and additionally meet special learners’ needs. “Music supports the child’s total learning environment by enhancing literature, language arts, mathematics, science, transitions, and the theater arts” (Flohr, 2010, p. 12).

Definition of the Problem

In the past decade, budget cuts have caused many schools to reassess and prioritize necessities in order to support the content academic areas in a traditional school curriculum. One of the main foci of NCLB is strengthening and increasing the literacy development of America’s children, and yet, according to NAEP (2007), as of 2007 New York State literacy rates still ranked below the nationwide proficiency level. The NAEP measured fourth grade students using a scale of 0 to 500 and found that New York students’ reading performance was 69% at or above the basic level with only 36% at the

level of proficiency. African American students, Latino students, and students from low-income households ranked even lower, measuring 26%, 27%, and 28% respectively; as a result, these students were classified as *at-risk*.

The site for this study was a Title I urban elementary school located in the upper Manhattan section of New York City, and the four participants were teachers from prekindergarten to fifth grades. Demographically, the school was comprised of almost 700 students, of which 16.3% received independent educational plans, 85.9% received free lunch, 89% were Hispanic, 10% were African-American, 1% was White and other ethnic backgrounds, and 55% were English-language learners. As a Title I school, the NCLB mandated that every child reach 100% proficiency levels in language arts and mathematics by the 2013–2014 academic year (New York City Department of Education, 2010a). The standards showed that the school did not meet AYP for the 2011-2012 school year. As a school in the advanced restructuring stage, it was paramount that AYP be reached by the 2013-2014 school year or it would mean the school would be placed under corrective action by the state, which would inhibit the ability of the school to remain open.

The 2011–2012 progress report for this school reflected the student performance on the New York State Language Arts Exam (ELA). The statistics showed 33.8% of the students performed at the proficiency levels of 3 (meeting expectations) and 4 (exceeding expectations) combined. Levels 1 and 2 are considered below-grade standards. The school's data results on the state assessments, in ELA, over the past 4 years were as follows: 2006 – 31.10%, 2007 – 34.4%, 2008 – 51.0%, 2009 – 56%, 2010 – 0%, 2011 –

36.7%, and 2012 – 34.5% (New York City Department of Education, 2013). The goal of the school was to garner an increase of 3%, in the number of students performing at proficiency in ELA, by the end of the 2013–2014 school year (New York City Public Schools, 2010b). Due to the results on the New York State standardized examinations and overall performance progress report for the school, it ranked 10.5 out of 25 points, which gave the school a “C” grade. This was based on a scale with grades A, B, C, D, and F (New York City Public Schools, 2013).

Over the past 5 years, this site school had incorporated a number of action plans to address the low performance. Those students performing below Levels 3 and 4 were required to attend an early intervention tutorial 4 days a week. There were also small group instructions to directly focus on the group’s insufficiencies. Educators developed incentives in an accelerated readers program to encourage literacy. Additionally, there were afterschool programs and pull-out classes (New York City Public Schools, 2010c). With a litany of instructional approaches, these current efforts had shown some gains; however, the school was still over 50% below the mandate of 100% proficiency, which had to be reached by 2014.

At the time of this research, only 42% of the students were projected to reach proficiency by 2014. Additionally, the participants for this study had also received similar projections for their current classes of students. Regardless of the fact that the arts are an important inclusion in NCLB, in most schools nationwide, music has been credited with little significance as it remains omitted as one of the core academic subjects. Jensen (2001) declared, “music nourishes our integrated sensory, attention, cognition, and other

motor capacities which are the driving forces behind all other learning” (p. 2). Music-infused lessons integrated in the reading and writing structure can set the foundation for literacy goals for at-risk students to reach. In the Annual Arts in Schools Report (2009-2010), New York City’s Mayor Bloomberg stated

Reading and writing are essential tools, but so is the ability to think critically, to understand abstract concepts, to create, to innovate. These are skills that our students need to compete in a 21st century economy ... and these are exactly the kinds of skills that a strong arts education will develop (p. 112).

In developing this study, I had hypothesized these lessons would show evidence of fulfilling the mandates of NCLB and answering the urgent need for the nation’s literacy to improve.

Nature of Study

The case study methodology was chosen based on the constructivist paradigm of Gardner’s (1983) theory of the multiple intelligences. Creswell (1998) stated, “A case study explores a program, event, activity, or individuals through a detailed and in-depth collection of data from multiple sources of information” (p. 61). With the theory of the multiple intelligences, Gardner (1983) discussed the phenomenon of the eight multiple intelligences (learning styles) an individual can embody. One of these intelligences is the learning style that connects with music and the arts. A qualitative case study design was used to address the question of the perspectives of teachers who use music-infused lesson as an instructional approach to enhance reading and writing.

There were four teacher participants from the selected school. The participating teachers were from the same school within the District 6 corridor in Manhattan's Washington Heights community in New York City. These participants were selected because they were in what the New York State Department of Education considered an at-risk population and they currently used music-infusion in their reading and writing lessons. I was also a teacher who worked in the selected school for 14 years with the participants.

As the researcher, I actively collected data and was an observer in the study. The data were a compilation of interviews, focus group, and observations of the teacher participants. There were a total of four interviews performed. Each interview was comprised of the same questions and lasted no more than 1 hour. From the interview process, I expected to be able to gain a sense of the teacher participants' perspectives on teaching and their viewpoint about teaching via a music-infused instructional curriculum verses the traditional curriculum method currently established by the school. In addition, there was a focus group with the participants and observations done in their respective classrooms. All data collected were tape recorded, transcribed, and coded.

The observations allowed me to observe the teachers' perspectives and approach to teaching during instruction for each learning environment. Documentation was made of the observations during curriculum instruction. Written permission was obtained through the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the school principal, and teacher participants. All permission complied with the regulations set up by Walden University. A qualitative research study method was used and, to ensure accuracy of data,

all findings were triangulated, peer debriefed, clarified of the researcher's bias, and included negative or discrepant information.

Research Question

The question guiding this research study was the following: What are teacher perspectives about using music-infused lessons in reading and writing? The participants were interviewed and were also a part of a focus group to discuss their perspectives. In addition, each participant was observed teaching language arts lessons that integrated the use of music as an alternative method to help increase motivation, creativity, and sustained-attention ability in children; I also observed the impact of those lessons on student-performance levels. The observations involved analyzing and reviewing research-based strategies, theories, and studies suggested and performed by researchers such as Overy and Molnar-Szakacs (2006), Strickland and Morrow (2006), O'Herron and Siebenaler (2007), Flohr (2006, 2011), and the Arts Education Partnership(2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case was to observe, document, and analyze music-infused lessons used by teachers in prekindergarten to fifth grade to enhance reading and writing skills. It explored teachers' perspectives about using music-infused lessons as an alternative pedagogical method for reading and writing. According to the test scores presented by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; 2007), New York State has made minimal progress in enhancing students' performance in the content area of language arts. This qualitative case study explored teacher's use of music-infused lessons to enhance reading and writing. Researchers Jensen (2008), Reeves

(2007), and Strickland and Morrow (2006) performed studies that documented how a well-designed music-infused program can stimulate and motivate changes in a student's performance levels in many ways. According to Deasy (2003), "Good arts programs in elementary and middle schools not only build skills needed to learn reading, writing, and math, but motivate students to learn, particularly those at risk of failure" (p. 14). Reeves (2007) also affirmed the arguments regarding the impact the arts, such as music, have on literacy. One such argument starts from the observation that many economically disadvantaged students seem to have insufficient basic knowledge in academic content areas. As such, without increasing the strict reinforcement of basic knowledge skills, they will still be at a major learning deficit. Reeves argued that those schools that provide a broad curriculum to their students achieve better performance across the curriculum (pp. 80–81).

Music can be infused and integrated into any core academic curriculum. According to Oreck (2001), "[i]ntegrating the curriculum is finding an alternative way to deliver the same concept using different ideas and methods" (p. 134). Growing evidence has supported the need for changes to occur in teaching practices that will include innovative strategies that create additional alternative methods to stimulate children's learning. Music-infused lessons can inspire students to write by creating a stimulating feeling and a nonthreatening environment that promotes a reassuring attitude to achieve (Graham & Harris, 2002). Motivation is a major agent bolstering an increase in reading and writing. Although a variety of variables can affect performance levels in language arts, lack of interest and motivation in the classroom are among the leading causes

(Graham, 2005). In accordance with the research, at the World Science Festival Symposium, Sacks (2008) argued for music's transformative abilities to change and trigger mental abilities in humans. Sacks contended that it is very important to have music in schools because, regardless of those who may have doubts about the research, there is a transformation that takes place in the person as a result of musical stimulation. Research outcomes suggested that music has the ability to fuse many of the variables that can affect student performance and powerfully motivate children (Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2006). D'Agrosa (2008) and Gupta (2006) further asserted that music can indeed create the environment for learning to flourish, but it continues to remain at the bottom of curriculum priorities.

Conceptual Framework

Behavioral sciences and brain-based research are the result of researchers' interest in cognitive development in humans. Cognitive development is the "understanding of how individuals come to know" (Lambert et al., p. 8). The earliest account of the theory of cognition emerged from Piaget (1969). Piaget's theory of cognition "suggests that cognition forms and reforms based on the experiences, beliefs, and values of the individual" (p. 7). This is the crux of the constructivist theory. Constructivism theorists would support the principle that "the development of personal schema and the ability to reflect upon one's experiences are key principles. Human growth is a moral imperative. New understandings of the brain and implications for teaching and learning support constructivism" (Lambert et al., p. 14).

Under the influence of constructivism, noted researcher Gardner (1983) developed the theory of the multiple intelligences to show the many different ways humans learn to formulate cognition. As a result of his theory, Gardner began to look closely at the relationship of arts in education. Gardner's theory of the multiple intelligences would indicate that children learn in many different ways: linguistic, logical/mathematical, musical, kinesthetic, visual/spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Thus, music and the arts fit into the idea that learning through this realm causes the person to connect with his or her learning capabilities. Gardner later cofounded an organization, Project Zero, with Nelson Goodman. This organization focuses studies on arts education and school reform. Gardner and Goodman claimed the arts as a cognitive development. Goodman stated, "[t]he arts are cognitive in nature...the arts are now considered a gateway to the processes of thinking and learning"(Project Zero, p. 1).

The Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA, as cited in Ingram & Riedel, 2003) performed a 4-year study on students in the Minneapolis public schools called *The Annenberg Challenge in Minneapolis*. In this study, educators and artist collaboratively created arts-infused instruction for students in grades three to five. As a result, data showed the third grade students who participated saw gains of 1.02 points in reading and 1.08 in math on the Northwest Achievement Level Tests in reading and mathematics. There was a 1.32 point gain in reading for fourth graders and .71 points in mathematics for fifth grade students (Ingram & Riedel, 2003, p. iv, v).

At the Department of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin, Rauscher et al. (1997) performed a study on 78 preschoolers, of whom 34 were given private computer lessons and 24 were given other controls. Rauscher et al. found the students receiving the piano lessons performed significantly better on the spatial-temporal test given to them. The results showed a more than one standard deviation and lasted more than 1 day. Rauscher et al. concluded that increased magnitudes of musical training will increase the spatial-temporal reasoning, which is the skills used in learning mathematics and science (p. 1).

Catterall (2002) suggested the hypothesis of the *transfer of learning*. This transfer occurs in the brain causing neurological stimulus when a child is involved in the arts. “Transfer denotes instances where learning in one context assists learning in a different context” (Catterall, 2002, p. 151). There is a connection that evolves linking the cognitive to the affective developments in the brain. “Cognitive development is defined in this compendium as increased abilities and expertise in academic achievement or social understanding. Affective development is the willingness of a person to put their skills to work” (p. 154). This statement supports the idea that learning through the use of the music culture, in content/subject areas, stimulates and motivates students to connect with their learning capabilities. Educators have used music and the fine arts integration to stimulate and focus students allowing them the ability to concentrate better. As a result, focusing causes students to visualize, retain, and process information culminating in increased student productivity and academic success.

Definition of Terms

Music-infused curriculum: A curriculum in which musical concepts (e.g., rhythmic patterns, melodies, tones, beats) and activities are integrated in core academic subjects (Snyder, 1999).

Musical intelligence: Human intelligence that reacts positively to or is stimulated by sounds, tones, beats, and rhythmic patterns from the environment, machines, the human voice, or musical instruments (Gardner, 2006).

Sustained attention ability: The ability to maintain a consistent behavioral response during continuous and repetitive activity (Conners, 2009).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope of Delimitations

This study was a qualitative case study of four certified elementary school teachers in the New York City public school system. These teachers have all worked together, as coworkers for over 10 years. This study explored the perspectives of teachers who use music infusion to enhance their reading and writing lessons. The participants were interviewed and were also a part of a focus group to discuss their respective perspectives on the topic; I also observed them teaching lessons in their respective classrooms. The expectation was that the study would bring forth increased awareness of the varied ways and rationale of teachers using music as an instructional tool to enhance learning. Marzano (2003) stated, “A teacher-level factor that affects student achievement is instructional practices” (p. 78). Delimitations did exist for this study. The validity of the study relied on the consistency and involvement of the participants and their possible disparities regarding their approaches to using music-infused lessons.

Significance of the Study

The effectiveness of music and the arts in education has long been debated (Project Zero, 1967). This study was significant to practitioners for a variety of reasons. There were educators who have interest in the impact music has on motivating an increase in student-performance levels in classrooms or schools. It was also of interest to other researchers who have supported the arts in education. Kelstrom (1998) stated, “Music deserves a place with the core subjects of math, science, history, and language arts. If it is given the opportunity, music can make a difference in the academic achievement of our schools” (pp. 34–43). For those practitioners who have students who seem to lack motivation for academic success, the results from this study could provide information that can help them stimulate and encourage those students to strive toward success. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) asserted that students who are struggling readers experience a positive reaction that comes as an effect of motivation, leading the student to want to be more engaged in their learning (p. 405). Documented studies have shown that a music-infused curriculum has made a positive difference between academic failure and academic success (Jensen, 2008; Reeves, 2007).

With the integration of music, students have made documented advances in their academic performance levels (O’Herron & Siebenaler, 2007). In 1999, Schmidt (as cited in Demorest & Morrison, 2000), a member of the board of directors for the National School Boards Association, stated before the U.S. House of Representatives that the National Schools Boards Association “supports raising student achievement, and we know music can do that. Students who participate in music earn higher grades and score

better on standardized tests” (p. 1). This study provided more information to further support the effectiveness of using music for enhancing the language arts curriculum. The intent of this study was to continue to advocate for the need for the music to be more integral in the education of children. With the implementation of this change, in the end, the students should gain the most benefits overall. The ultimate goal was to have student-performance levels increase, which should bolster higher academic achievement for all children.

Although there have been many documented studies showing the effectiveness of music infusion in school curricula, there are still skeptics who seek more proof (O’Herron & Siebenaler, 2007; Strickland & Morrow, 2006). There is still not enough data on the topic pertaining to students of urban metropolises such as New York City. Many cultural-arts activists in this urban area have pushed for changes in the education system (Arts Count Initiative, 2008). They have a strong desire for more arts to be integrated into New York City public schools; however, many school budgets do not allow for this. Additionally, many educators have not sought information or received professional development in instructional practices that integrate the arts in reading and writing.

Summary

The literature reviewed for this study suggested the strong need for more innovative strategies to be applied by educators to create the learning environment that would encourage literacy growth in children. In theory and research, there was substantial support for the hypothesis that music-infused lessons can enhance reading and writing. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to observe, document, and analyze music-

infused lessons used by teachers of prekindergarten through fifth grade to enhance reading and writing skills. The study explored teachers' perspectives about using music-infused lessons as an alternative pedagogical method for reading and writing.

Section 2 includes a review of studies on instructional strategies for implementing music-infused lessons in an elementary-level language arts program. In Section 3 I describe the methodology involved in collecting and analyzing data for the study. Section 3 also includes the context of the study, a criteria for selecting the participants, and the data collection process. Section 4 documents the implementation of the case study, detailing the interviews with the participants, focus group discussion, and the observations of each participant during their instruction of a music-infused language arts lesson. Section 4 includes the summary of the final results of the study. Section 5 includes why and how the study was done, interpretation of the findings, implication for social change, and recommendations for action.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This section provides a review of the documented literature on the topic of music-infused curricula. The literature supported the importance of increasing the presence of music in the structure of language-arts lessons and its effectiveness in enhancing reading and writing skills, especially in struggling, at-risk student populations. The review focused on research studies using music infusion in core-curriculum subjects such as reading and writing. Music infusion was used as an intervention and strategy to motivate and stimulate cognitive factors currently inhibiting literacy development and growth of elementary-level, low-performing readers and writers.

The literature reviewed reflected the most current research available on music education. The information was garnered from searches in various Internet databases including, but not limited to, the following: Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, eLibrary, Walden University Dissertations, ERIC, eReference Encyclopedia, International Reading Association, Education Research Complete, National Reading Panel, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *Music Educators Journal*, *Journal of School Psychology*, *Journal of Aesthetics*, and SAGE Journal Publications using BOOLEAN operators, the search terms included *music*, *connections*, *reading*, *writing*, *infusion*, *curriculum*, *at-risk*, *sustained-attention ability*, *creativity*, *integration*, and *motivation*. This was a field of study in which relatively few studies exist. Because recent literature was scarce, I included studies older than 5 years.

The Role of Music and the Arts in Learning Language Arts

Music becomes a major aspect when integrated in the design of instructional practices. According to Gipe (2002), “Music provides opportunities for students who experience difficulty with reading and writing to think and learn through another language that is repetitive, melodious, and emotional” (p. 371). In early childhood-literacy development, educators most often teach students words, phrases, and associations through singing. Letter names and sounds, phonemic awareness, word identification, and vocabulary are also taught through songs. For example the tune “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” is often applied to the teaching of the alphabet. D’Agrosa (2008) supported music-infusion in literacy lessons as a prereading skill. Recitation of rhymes and singing songs as a group often encourages shy students to join in. This increases their level of confidence and motivates them to participate in language-arts lessons (D’Agrosa, 2008, p. 6). This practice is often used as a pedagogical tool for teaching beginning young learners.

Mizener (2008) and O’Herron and Siebenaler (2007) suggested alternative pedagogical methods that incorporated arts-infused lessons, to develop and increase reading fluency in primary-grade students. The authors acknowledged the importance of having well-trained teachers who continually seek professional pedagogical practices that will advance student learning. Winner and Hetland (2000) explained that in schools in the United States, the arts (music) have little significance in educational curricula. In contrast to that statement, the results of the O’Herron and Siebenaler (2007) study identified music as an important tool for learning that should have an important role in grade

schools. The study confirmed music's exceptional ability to elevate the reading levels in their students. The study explained how the rhythmic movement and phrases in fluent reading are patterned to prosodic expressions in musical rhythms. Mizener (2008), O'Herron and Siebenaler (2007), and McDonald and Fisher (2006) further explained that reading fluently is when a person is able to read accurately with a smooth, steady, and flowing pace. Fluency also includes prosody, which is one's ability to put words together into natural speech rhythms with intonation, inflection, and flow. Nursery rhymes, songs, and chants are excellent examples of the rhythmic movement of prosodic expressions.

Researchers have proposed that music acts as a trigger for many different cognitive skills and thus has the ability to motivate a child to become more engaged in his or her learning. Educational researchers Strickland and Morrow (2006) asserted that because children love to sing, it is a catalyst that can be used to help develop their reading and writing skills. Incorporating music into the lesson allows the teacher to teach word recognition through lyrics, to develop writing by having the young student write the lyrics, and simultaneously to ignite the student's ability to create by allowing the student to create mental images for the words and music heard and sung (Strickland & Morrow, 2006, p. 1). As in all forms of learning, different cognitive skills contribute to the development and evolution of the individual's ability to learn. To leave the arts out of education is like stifling a cognitive skill that is at the disposal of every learner.

Support for such activities has been provided by investigations by other researchers. Smith (2000) affirmed that musical activity complements a wide range of literacy learning activities (p. 2). These activities include lessons in identifying letter

names and letter sounds, phonemic awareness, print conventions, the method of reading from left to right and top to bottom, and proper punctuation skills. Lessons are expanded to teach vocabulary, decoding skills, writing, and background knowledge. Evoking background knowledge enables a process in which the teacher may use familiar musical tunes as a base framework, changing lyrics to teach other academic concepts (International Reading Association, 2002, pp. 189–190). Once a child learns the rhythm of tunes and acquires letter recognition, a teacher is able to write the letters out on a board/chart and begin to foster ways for a child to make a visual connection to the word, which ultimately helps that child to begin to create words and phrases from the newly learned words.

Mason, Steedly, and Thormann (2005) conducted a study on 34 focus-group teachers and arts professionals throughout 16 different states. Throughout the study, participants collectively agreed that arts-infused lessons supported the NCLB emphasis on project-based learning. Students have the ability to convey their comprehension of the subject matter through the arts media. Marzano (2003) stated that “nonlinguistic representation allows students to generate mental images representing content, act out content, draw pictures or pictographs representing content” (p .82). This approach can also be applied to the subjects of music and art. These methods help to create an environment conducive to learning. Teachers cannot trigger a student to learn, but teachers should generate those situations and circumstances that will support learning (Smith, 2000). Darrow (2008) and Smith (2000) suggested that teachers must strive to be more innovative in their pedagogical approach in order to provide the type of learning

environment that will serve to encourage and motivate students to learn. Music-infused lessons can create this type of transformation in the student.

Eschrich, Munte, and Attenmueller (2008) designed a control-group behavioral-memory experiment. Participants were exposed to 40 musical pieces, each lasting 20 to 30 seconds. This experiment was repeated 1 week later with the 40 pieces in addition to 40 new pieces. At the end of the experiment, the researchers asked the participants to differentiate between the original musical pieces and the newer pieces. In each account, the results showed that the participants' recognition of the original musical pieces was significantly better. This study further validated the emotional connection related to musical memory. The study confirmed that listening to music, even in a passive state, activates many psychological functions as emotion, memory, attention, and imagery in the brain network. Conclusively, the results of this study supported the premise of the marked influence of music on one's emotional and cognitive systems (Eschrich et al., 2008, p. 48).

The Effects of Music in the Learning Environment

In 1993, the American Psychological Association developed an educational task force to look more closely at student learning. As a result, 14 principles of learning evolved. One specific principle focuses on developmental and individual differences. The principle is that "learning, although ultimately a unique adventure for all, progresses through various common stages of development influenced by inherited and experimental, or environmental factors" (American Psychological Association, 1993, p. 19). The focus of the task force was to develop a framework that would further foster

optimal learning. This principle suggests the need for students to be given a broader base of teaching strategies in order to unlock and nurture each student's optimal learning capacity. Flohr (2004, 2010) and Medina (2008) asserted connections between multiple brain stimuli and learning. "Approaching a concept from multiple angles strengthens overall understanding. Our senses evolved to work together so we learn best if we stimulate several senses at once" (Persellin & Flohr, 2011, p. 29). Implementing music-infused lessons in the core-curriculum subjects of reading and writing can create the platform for developmental and individual differences to be encouraged.

Although high-stakes tests and budget cuts have caused schools to eliminate the arts as a core-curriculum item in many schools, the arts are most often absent in schools where there are large numbers of minority students. Delisio (2002) reported data from a study performed by the Arts Education Partnership that stated, "Economically disadvantaged students, those needing remedial instruction, and young children experience the most gains in learning from arts education" (p. 1). Implementing this method of teaching, facilitates the process of intellectual development and helps students learn in other basic subjects, such as language arts (Delisio, 2002, pp. 36–40). Although studies cannot conclusively demonstrate that the arts make one smarter, researchers and theorists agree that students gain motivation when they learn through the influence or involvement in the arts (Demorest, 2000, pp. 33–42). Winner and Hetland (2000) stated that of all the different academic subjects, the arts have been the only subject that must continuously prove their worth to be a part of a curriculum and duly prove their ability to cause transformation in a child's learning environment (pp. 77–89). In a two year study

implemented in 37 public schools in Minneapolis to improve student achievement, school climate, and communities through arts-integrated curricula, analysis of the program reported the students showed academic improvement and were more engaged in their learning in all content areas (Ingram & Meath, 2007).

Theorists further affirmed that music has an ability to link information, materials, and concepts from one discipline and be also used to assist in the teaching or reinforcement of another concept in a different academic area. Snyder (1999) agreed with Winner and Hetland (2000) that including music and the arts as part of student learning is valuable (p. 1). Winner and Hetland (2000) affirmed that music has the ability to improve and change the student-learning environment. Integrating music into the curriculum creates an environment that stimulates motivational levels in students (pp. 77–89).

Connections Between Music Cognition and Other Types of Cognition

The study of the process of cognitive development is the “understanding of how individuals come to know” (Lambert, 2002, p. 8). Piaget and Inhelder’s theory of cognition (1969) suggested that cognition forms and reforms are based on the experiences, beliefs, and values of the individual (p. 7). This is also the crux of constructivist theory. Constructivist theorists support the principles that explain how, “the development of personal schema and the ability to reflect upon one’s experiences are key principles” (Lambert, 2002, p. 14). Human reaction is based on three components that affect attitude—cognition, affect, and behavior—which develop into the make-up of a person’s individual characteristics.

Bloom, Masia, and Kranthwohl (1956, 1976) explained the importance of learned characteristics and learned outcomes. They put forth theories of affective and cognitive domains. The affective domain encompasses the characteristics of attitude, feeling, self-esteem, interests, and values, all of which direct a person's motivational level. When both of these domains interact during the instructional process, this interlocking relationship will result in cognitive-learning outcomes and associated affective outcomes. The New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning (2010) enumerated the first four standards as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which encompass two skill groups: receiving and responding. Receiving skills are listening and reading, whereas speaking and writing are responding skills. Using music and infusing it in lessons to teach children language arts (reading and writing) taps directly into a student's affective energy. The affective energy is the link to a person's motivation that leads to their desire to achieve. Building one's affective domain stimulates motivation, which directly correlates with increased self-efficacy.

Another aspect of self-efficacy is a person's view of their personal ability to be successful at performing tasks. It involves the overlapping exchange of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. Bandura (1986, 1989) argued the need to develop self-efficacy in school environments as a means to increase overall student performance in all academic areas. Bloom et al. (1956, 1976) directly aligned academic and studying skills to self-efficacy. Lindia (1992) reviewed several self-efficacy studies performed on students and the data results were the same. All cases showed that higher efficacy levels resulted in higher performance levels of students in all academic subjects.

The studies performed by Bloom et al. (1956, 1976), Piaget (1969), and Bandura (1986, 1989) in cognitive developments contribute to the foundations of constructivist teaching and learning theories. Under the influence of constructivism, noted researcher Gardner (1993) developed the theory of the multiple intelligences showing the many different ways humans formulate cognition. To develop the theory, Gardner (1993) examined the relationship between the arts and education and documented that children learn in many different ways: linguistic, logical/mathematical, musical, kinesthetic, visual/spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. This diversity of modes of learning aligns with the idea that teaching through the realm of multiple intelligences enables the person to connect with their personal learning style. Gardner's theory suggests that educators should reassess current traditional methods of teaching and design lessons that connect to different approaches of learning. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is representative of current trends in educational research that embody the understanding of a myriad of learning modalities.

Gardner (1993, 2006) explained that musical intelligence is central to human experience. This particular intelligence can be identified in an age as early as 2 months and is the one most closely linked to the other intelligences. Musical intelligence is related to sounds, tones, beats, rhythm, and music, whether the sound emits from the environment, machines, the human voice, or musical instruments. Theorists, neuroscientists, and psychologists continue to speculate as to why musical intelligence emerges first (Flohr and Hodges, 2006). These theorists state that because the musical

intelligence begins to develop first, it becomes the foundation on which other intelligences begin to take form (Gardner, 1993, 2006).

Goodman founded the organization, Project Zero, in 1967. The objective of this education research group at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University was to initiate and analyze studies on the “philosophical, psychological, and conceptual issues in the arts,” arts education, and the call for school reform to better meet the multiple learning styles of children (Project Zero, 1987, p. 1). Project Zero (1967) research educators approached the arts as means to enable cognitive development. It further asserted that the process one uses to understand different art forms initiates the same level of cognitive achievement as it does for someone to learn to read, write, or add. Project Zero research focuses on the importance of education in the arts as a cognitive ability that links to learning. Gardner (1987) further affirmed: “If we omit the arts from the curriculum, we are in effect shortchanging the mind” (p. 31). The researchers suggested that rigorous cognition involved in arts-related activities is to be likened to the same cognitive activity displayed in performing tasks in the sciences (Project Zero, 1987, p.1).

Gullett (2008) asserted the importance of the arts in several European and Asian countries. The Netherlands, Japan, and Hungary, are three primary countries that mandate the infusion of the arts, with the greatest emphasis on music as a part of the standard curriculum in both elementary and secondary schools. Additionally, it has been documented that these three countries rank at the helm of educational lists worldwide. Gullett also explained that early theorists from the 1930s and 1940s, Dewey and Vygotsky, both deemed the arts to be essential to the constructed cognitive knowledge

base of the learner and function as a positive tool to use during the teaching and learning process (p. 13).

Cognitive and affective developments are linked in brain stimulation. Flohr (2001) and Catterall (2002) related the effects of cognitive and affective domains in developing the hypothesis of the transfer of learning through the arts. This transfer occurs in the brain causing neurological stimuli when a child is involved in arts such as music. This neurological stimulation taps into the child's affective domain. Hallam (2010) explained:

As we engage with different musical activities over long periods of time permanent changes occur in the brain. These changes reflect not only what we have learned, but also how we have learned. They will all influence the extent to which our developed skills are able to transfer to other activities. (p. 270)

Learning through the art of music in the content subject area of reading and writing can stimulate and motivate students to connect with their learning abilities. Winner and Hetland (2000) stated that schools that emphasize the importance of the arts, design their curriculum, such that academic subjects are taught through the use of the arts. The arts are used as motivational entry points into academic subjects (p. 9). This statement parallels Overy and Molnar-Szakacs (2006) theory of the transfer of learning. Those students who were able to encounter success through the perspective of the arts often gained an inner willingness and motivation. The music became a stimulus to allow the student to make learning connections.

In 1992, the National Reading Research Center conducted an investigation exploring the significance of motivation and its effects on student learning. The results of the investigation showed evidence that, “a less motivated reader spends less time reading, exerts lower cognitive effort, and is less dedicated to full comprehension than a more highly motivated reader” (National Reading Research Center, 2000, p. 406). The students’ increased level of motivation should also translate into students pushing to reach higher academic achievement. These sorts of effective teaching practices incorporate differentiated instruction methods to better meet the needs of the students.

The cognitive effects music and the arts have on the learner aligns with research on brain-based teaching. McBrien and Brandt (1997) explained that the best environment for student learning to thrive is one in which the student feels relaxed and secure, thus allowing the student to be able to remove any fears of failure (p. 19). The researchers also asserted that the brain is continuously in search of patterns, meanings, and connections. An unthreatening environment allows for the type of authentic learning that increases the brain’s ability to make connections and preserve information. Reviewing Education and the Arts Project (2000) closely examined the effects of the arts and academic achievement. The results also showed parallel connections to those shown by McBrien and Brandt (1997), and Catterall (2002). Winner and Hetland (2000) confirmed,

If students experience success in the subject when it is viewed through an artistic lens, their willingness to stay with the subject may increase; thus increased confidence should lead to increased motivation and effort, which in turn should result in higher achievement. (p. 9)

Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanga (1999) stated there were positive increases over time in the academic success levels of children in Grades 8 through 12. The percentage of students in Grade 8 earning mostly As or Bs in English with high involvement in the arts was 82.6% compared to those with low involvement at 67.2%. The percentage of students performing in the top two quartiles on standardized tests in Grade 10 with high involvement was 65.7% compared to the 47.5% who had low involvement. The same variance was seen in Grade 12 where 57.4% of the students with high involvement received success in the top two quartiles on the standardized tests versus those with low involvement at 39.3%. This also held true for those students stemming from low-income, and low-educated parental households (pp. 2, 5). In the Catterall et al. study, high involvement in the arts was identified as those students who were taking arts-related classes both in and out of school, in addition to their participation in activities such as band, chorus, and orchestra. While Catterall's study yielded results that indicated an increased performance level on standardized tests, results (as with any study) should be interpreted with caution. The rationale for this is because there is no direct correlation that the arts involvement was the cause of the students' higher scores. The study did not indicate whether the students opting for arts involvement were more intellectually or socially advantaged children compared to other students. Barry (2010) stated that studies of elementary schools which have adopted whole school reform practices, by infusing the arts as a central part of curriculum as a teaching strategy to bolster school improvement, have found that initiating these practices has had a positive effect on student performances on standardized tests in mathematics and language arts.

Instructional Strategies Supporting Music Infusion

Educators have used music integration to focus students, allowing them the ability to concentrate better. As a result, focusing is the main component to establish the sustained-attention ability students need to visualize, retain, and process information, culminating in increased student productivity and academic success. “One way to address motivation and engagement for struggling readers is through literacy instruction that moves beyond the linear world of printed text and that incorporates specific strategy instruction within an integrated curriculum” (Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, & Rasinski, 2008, pp. 195–213). Research studies by Flohr (2011), Hoo Lum (2008), DAgrosa (2008), and Mizener (2008) all support the implementation of music infusion as a nonlinguistic strategy that provides students an alternative teaching method, enabling them to grasp and comprehend their learning. Marzano (2003) stated instructional practices are essential for student achievement. Teachers must implement research-based strategies into their instructional framework. Flohr & Hodges (2006) suggest the important for the human brain to have some level of involvement with music because it may increase the brain’s fluidity as opposed to their being an absence of musical involvement during the human lifetime (p. 21). Structuring classroom instruction with the integration of music and the arts aligns with the instructional strategy of nonlinguistic representation.

Goleman’s emotional intelligence theory (1998) suggested that educators should learn the individual student’s emotional intelligences and couple it with teaching strategies as a way of individualizing instruction in the classroom. The theory encompassed self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Studies conducted by Glazer (1989), Eisner (2002), and Goleman (1998) identified music as the catalyst that evoked motivation in students. Their individual research studies displayed evidence that the motivational boost the students experienced, when music-infused lessons were used to teach language arts, rejuvenated a desire in the students that resulted in them achieving increased reading-performance levels. Bellisario & Donovan (2012) stated, “Teachers report that arts integration stimulates deep learning, creates increased student engagement, and cultivates students’ investment in learning.” This assertion is based on a study gathered from 204 teachers in 19 states through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and classroom observations.

Contemporary researchers have continuously shifted the paradigms to seek new approaches to advance children’s literacy development. In the book, *Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write*, Strickland and Morrow (1989) discussed a compilation of research studies performed by a team of theorists. The research documents described evidence of successful methods initiated by teachers of Grades Kindergarten through 6, using music-infused lessons to teach reading and writing (pp. vii–viii). One of the contributing theorists, Glazer (1989), explained how music and songs allow students to pattern fluency of oral language and vocabulary by using songs and songbooks. Through this method of music-infused lessons, teachers were able to use the textual content of songs and familiar rhyming chants and change lyrics to reflect things related to the students, their lifestyles, cultures, and families. Writing exercises were also stimulated when the children were allowed to use the same familiar tunes to compose

new lyrics and create new songs (pp. 36–38). Extended explanations of this method and other similar approaches will be discussed in Section 3 of my case study.

One of the newer innovative approaches to using music infusion to enhance reading and writing is with the use of karaoke. “Karaoke stems from the Japanese words “kara” and “oke” meaning “empty orchestra.” The process requires using a musical system of prerecorded popular tunes that the person sings live while using a video screen to follow the lyrics. Gupta (2006) described a study using the teaching strategy of the karaoke machine as a tool that helps to motivate and enhance struggling readers. The study found that the students who previously showed lack of interest in both reading and music became thoroughly engaged in the reading activity when the reading was coupled with karaoke.

The 8-day study was performed at a summer camp program of 25 students in Grades 2 and 3. Demographically, the students were from a Title I inner-city, urban elementary school where 95% of the students were low-performing readers of African American heritage. The students were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The three-component study consisted of: karaoke singing, silent-karaoke singing, and repeat-reading karaoke. Each phase focused on increasing familiarity of the song lyrics, learning the music, and reading speed. Gupta (2006) found that after the short trial, there was no difference between the control group and the experimental group in reading performance, based on the reading pretest and posttest administered. Data showed a significantly higher motivational level among those students in the experimental group than those in the control group. Additionally, the students raised their levels of self-

esteem and self-confidence, and displayed an overwhelming desire to participate in the karaoke-reading group.

An additive garnered from this method is that the act of reading lyrics and singing the rhythmic patterns did contribute to increasing the students' reading fluency. Gupta (2006) stated, "The use of music in the classroom can make the entire learning process more enjoyable and can stimulate 'right brain' learning" (p. 81). Music strongly connects to the link between motivation and learning. The student's learning environment will influence the student's desire and ability to learn. Eisner (2002) stated:

One of the first things that work as the arts develop is a sense of relationship, that nothing stands alone ... every aspect of the work affects every other. ... The arts teach the ability to engage the imagination as a source of content. ... They are among the most powerful ways we become human, and that is reason enough to earn them a place in our schools. (p. 1)

Deriving a set of abstract relations from the research of Glazer (1989), Gupta (2006), and Eisner (2002), one may theorize that music and songs motivate and inspire children to engage in reading; allow children to develop fluency in oral language; and, most significantly, music, as an art, makes children realize intuitively that nothing stands alone; everything is related. The teacher of literacy may thus find a methodological continuum in the following steps: increasing children's motivation and inspiring them to read, getting them to realize the interrelatedness of things and, finally, make them "see" a pattern—similarity—between the *flow* of music and fluency of oral language.

Flohr (2006) affirmed that music supports the whole-language approach in reading, while increasing phonemic awareness. Music-infused lessons help create relationships between letters and sounds, thus enabling word decoding. An example of this is demonstrated in the parody, “Five Musicians” that is sung to the tune of “*Old MacDonald*.” The song incorporates the character names: “Aggie, Eddie, Iggie, Ozzie, and Uzzie, replacing the original farm-animal characters, to teach the short vowel sounds. An example of the song follows:

Five musicians came to town, singing funny sounds. The first one’s name is “Aggie” and this is what he sang: With an (h) A, (h) A here and an (h) A (h) A there. Here an (h) A, there an (h) A, everywhere an (h) A, (h) A. Five musicians came to town, singing funny sounds. (p. 12)

This musical approach is an excellent carrier of information and can help students practice spelling, alphabets, numbers, and colors.

To further support this strategic instructional approach, Flohr (2006) added that in the book, *Mary Wore Her Red Dress*, children are able to become aware of patterns through the phrasing of the words on each page. A song such as “*I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*,” stimulates the child’s ability to make predictions as they determine the next character to be swallowed. Additionally, sequencing can be taught through songs like: “*Bought Me a Cat*” and “*If You’re Happy and You Know It*.” With each song, the child must keep the sequence of events in order as the song is repeated. These songs also allow teachers to follow up the singing by asking their students

questions that relate to when a particular character or instrument was introduced in the song.

Theorists of the arts, such as Monaco (2007), hypothesized that music is the most abstract form of art, followed by some of the more concrete performance arts such as dance and drama. Oral poetry comes next; followed by visual arts like drawing and sculpting; followed by the written arts such as literature. Yet, it is perhaps one of nature's unsolved phenomenon that children "take" to music much more readily and spontaneously than to reading. Monaco suggested that comprehending the more abstract prepares us to understand the relatively less abstract. Similarly, Burnaford, Aprill, and Weiss (2001) asserted, "Arts integration processes create the environment necessary for learning to occur and for the brain to be engaged in a complex way" (p. 9). Applying these researchers' concepts to Gupta's (2006) experiments with the Karaoke, and to Eisner (2002), we may hypothesize that as children begin to intuitively comprehend the relatedness of music, they unconsciously begin to comprehend reading.

The Arts Education Partnership (2006) reported 10 high-poverty schools that were participants in the Third Space Program study. These schools were involved in creating, performing, or responding to works of art and the positive and supportive relationship that developed as an outcome of the study. As an effect from the study, students gained an increased sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Additionally, both the behavior and attendance of these students improved. The participants reported feeling more engaged in their learning process and the educators and district officials documented significant improvements on standardized tests in reading and mathematics (p. 2).

In 2005, Mason et al. reported on a study conducted with 34 focus groups of teachers and artists from 16 different states. The teachers participating in this study worked collaboratively with arts specialists to create arts-infused lessons. Conclusively, the participants all agreed that the arts lessons allowed students to have the ability to convey their level of comprehension through an alternative method. The overall impact of the study was so significant that it resulted in a written response to the various school superintendents involved in the program from former U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige. Paige stated, “I believe the arts have a significant role in education both for their intrinsic value and for the ways in which they can enhance general and academic achievement in students” (Mason et al. p. 16). Secretary Paige further confirmed the arts are deemed a core academic subject under the NCLB. “Arts integration enables students to have direct experiences, be involved in making decisions about their learning and be engaged in lessons that are motivating” (Mason et al., 2005, p. 3). According to the data from the study, results suggested that incorporating music, as the art, into a lesson design can evoke motivation in students that will impact their learning by fusing a connection that enables children to learn and comprehend content from the various curriculum subject matters. Weinberger (1998) stated, “Music making appears to be the most extensive exercise for brain cells and their synaptic interconnections. Education in both music listening and music making facilitates students’ intellectual development and even helps students learn other basic subjects, such as reading” (p. 4). Using this integrated instructional approach can result in increased student-performance levels for the struggling reader or writer.

Review of Methodology

Qualitative Methodology and Design

One of the most common research strategies used is the case study. Yin (2009) explains that “case studies are most successful and beneficial when the researcher is exploring into the how or why about events that occur in which the researcher has little, if any, control over the situation” (p. 4). This is why case studies are most often used to analyze social phenomena. Case studies incorporate the use of direct observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts of the people involved in the particular practice or event. Although case studies can take a longer time to complete than other methods, it is possible to accomplish a successfully executed case study with a shorter narrative.

Creswell (2013) explains that well developed case studies should impart comprehensive insight about the case. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher forms an overall analysis based on the data collected in the case. To do this, interviews, documents, observations, and audio-visual materials are the multiple forms of collection the researcher can use (p. 98). For this study, the recommended data collection methods of interviews, observations, and focus group were used.

Alternative Methodology and Design

The two main methods for conducting research are qualitative and quantitative; the nature of the research questions used in this study, a quantitative approach would not be appropriate. The research question seeks to explore what are teacher perspectives about using music-infused lessons in reading and writing? Under the umbrella of qualitative research methods, common designs are narrative research, phenomenology,

grounded theory, and ethnography, none of which are aligned with this study. Creswell (2013) explains a narrative researcher as one who looks into the life of one individual and develops themes of the events that occur which is not the goal of this study. A phenomenological study allows the researcher to better understand an experience or phenomenon; grounded theory is used to develop a theory that is based on data that has been collected in the field; neither of which aligns with the purpose of this study. The last type of design is the ethnography in which the researcher describes and interprets a culture sharing group and how that group works which again is not an appropriate fit.

Summary

The literature reviewed implied that much of the success of a well-developed, music-infused reading and writing instruction relied on the educators' ability to properly and consistently implement the integrated lessons. Proper integration is a key factor. The more music is incorporated into the language arts lessons, the more continuous involvement will ultimately prove beneficial and create a synthesis for learning.

Section 3 reviews the methodology involved as a premise to use supportive documents that served as a foundational template to develop the study. Section 3 includes the description of the study and the theoretical framework that was used to construct the study. This section also included interviews, a focus group discussion with the participants, and the observations of their music-infused language arts lessons. Section 4 summarizes the final results of the study. Section 5 includes why and how the study was done, interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for action.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

This qualitative case study explored the teachers' perspectives and experiences with the use of music-infused lessons in the classroom during reading and writing instruction. The purpose was to observe and analyze the perspectives of teachers using this instructional approach. Additionally, via individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and observations, I explored the challenges and triumphs the participants encountered during these instructional lessons. Since the enactment of NCLB (2002), legislation has placed demands on teachers to increase student academic-performance levels in the targeted areas of language arts and mathematics. This action has forced the exclusion of the arts to allocate more time to the targeted core subjects. Teachers have been compelled to develop lessons that will stimulate and motivate students in ways that will elicit an increase in their academic-performance levels. The study was derived from the results and analysis garnered from the interviews, focus group, and observations of those participants. To begin this inquiry, I ascertained information through a qualitative research approach, focused on the research question pertaining to teacher perspectives about using music-infused lessons in reading and writing. Using a qualitative approach, I sought answers or meaning of a phenomenon through the perspective of the participants involved in the study (Creswell, 2008).

Qualitative Research Method and Design Approach

Qualitative research is defined as when the research takes four distinctive characteristics using natural settings in an attempt to grasp a better understanding of some

type of phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). The question guiding this research study was the following: What are teacher perspectives about using music-infused lessons in reading and writing? In addition, in order to conduct this research, there were diverse strategies that were used to obtain the information. The first characteristic is the researcher's attempt to understand the perspective people have about the world and their experiences. Hatch (2002) asserted "that the qualitative researcher works to understand the totality of participants' surroundings, lifestyles, and views on different experiences and settings in which they live/work" (p. 7). Hatch (2002) further explained "that all research is gathered solely by the researcher" (p. 7). For this study, I collected data by going directly to the participants in their authentic setting, the classroom. As the primary instrument, I used verbal and nonverbal communication to process, clarify, and summarize all received information. In an attempt to explain a phenomenon, the research must have an inductive process (Merriam, 2002). Hatch (2002) stated "that inductive data analysis allows the researcher to look for patterns of meaning in collected data to use as a means to make general statements about the phenomenon being investigated" (p. 161). This characteristic was paramount to the research process because there are generally insufficient theories available to explain the phenomenon. Merriam (2002) stated, "the researcher derives understanding through the data gathered which is then used to develop concepts, hypothesis, and theories" (p. 5).

It is through the development of this study that I anticipated the ability to connect a theory to explain the collected data. The last characteristic required the study be richly descriptive. Data garnered were documented through several facets such as observations,

interviews, field notes, quotations, and electronics. Additionally, I also used forms of media such as photographs and videography. The actual words and pictures of the participants were used instead of using numbers. The synthesis of these forms collectively developed into a richly descriptive study. I also used participants' authentic words to add weighted support to the study.

Creswell (2013) posited the five more frequently used research inquiry traditions: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (p. 2). To select the method for this study required a review of each of the five different traditions. The phenomenological study looks to understand a phenomenon through the description of the essence of the experience. The interviews should be lengthy and the data should be an analysis of compiled statements, meanings, themes. Ethnography is based primarily on extensive observations. The purpose was to describe and understand a cultural and social group. This required that the observations extend from 6 months to a year. In a biographical study, the researcher explores the life of one individual where the researcher prepares a detailed narrative of the individual's life based on several interviews and documents of that individual participant. To use the grounded theory required a data collection of interviews from 20 to 30 participants in order to show saturation and details from the field. The data analysis also required multiple, extensive coding. This would have been a potential method to use, but it would have "required more participants to properly execute this type of study properly" (Creswell, 2007, p. 134).

For the purpose of this study, the tradition that best fit this research study was a case-study design. According to Creswell (1998), a case study is "an exploration of a

'bounded system' or a case or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. These sources include: observations, interviews, audio-visual material, documents and reports" (p. 61). Hatch (2002) explained "a case study as a generic term used to identify an array of qualitative studies" (p. 31). Stake (2000) asserted "a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry" (p. 437). This traditional design attempts to analyze a group, individual, institution, or community and describe a phenomenon in depth using a bounded, integrated system (Merriam, 2002, p. 8).

The study was conducted as a case study of four teachers who taught in prekindergarten to fifth grade. The participants were analyzed as a whole group and were interviewed, and their responses analyzed to increase the validity of the study. Case studies are representative of a program or of experiences that are unique, experimental, typical, or even highly successful, which are then analyzed in-depth as a unit to better understand or describe a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). Stake (2000) explained "a case study, like all research types, has a conceptual structure that is usually organized around a small number of research questions" (p. 441). One of the strongest components of a case study is the fact that the research requires the researcher to experience the moment where and when the action actually occurs. "It entails observing and recording testimonies from the participants involved" (Coleman & Briggs, 2002, p. 110).

Context of Study

The site for this study was at a public school in the New York City Department of Education, District 6 corridor, located in the Washington Heights community. The

participants were selected because they taught in what is classified by the New York City Department of Education as an at-risk populated school. The site was a Title 1 school, which means that at least 40% of the school population was comprised of students from low-income households who were enrolled in the free-and-reduced-price lunch program. As stipulated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), nationwide, Title 1 schools receive supplemental funds to be used toward programs to improve student reading and mathematics performance levels on statewide tests. Additionally, as designated by NAEP (2007), the reading levels of these students were below the AYP set by the state. Creswell (1998) explained it is important for the researcher to use “purposeful selection” of participants with a clear criteria and rationale for the selection (p. 118). I had been a teacher in the same school district for 15 years. The participants had also worked as teachers in the same school site for a minimum of 10 years each. The participants and I had an excellent working relationship and each participating teacher willingly expressed an interest in participating in the study. Access to the site was gained through a gatekeeper. The formal gatekeeper was the principal of the school where the participants were employed. This gatekeeper was the initial contact person who was given thorough background information about the study and had a rapport with all of the participants. In this case, the participants were teachers of the identified classes (Creswell, 1998). At the time of this research, I had a professional relationship with the participants; however, I did not have any supervision responsibilities or duties with these participants.

Ethical Protection of Participants

In accordance with Creswell (2003), in order to begin this study, steps were taken to gain approval from the IRB. This permission, Walden University approval number 12-09-13-0111901, ensured that all of the participants' rights were protected and preserved. The school's site principal was given a letter of cooperation (See Appendix D) as a written request to use the site for the study. Upon approval, as the researcher, the researcher officially invited the participants to be a part of the study. The participants had no repercussions if they declined the invitation.

Each participant received an informed letter of consent detailing the process and procedures of the study. The letter explained that the study encompassed observing each participant in their classroom, an individual interview, and a focus group discussion. All information from the study were coded and locked in a secured file to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed that both the individual interview and focus group would not extend past 60 minutes and was audiotaped. Additionally, the participants were explained the process and opportunity for member checking of the findings for their own data. Furthermore, participants were reminded that at any point they had the right to withdraw from the study. Participants were also encouraged to ask any questions they had regarding the components of the study and barring any objections, the participants signed their consent form. This form was in compliance with the regulations set by the Walden University IRB. The form fully outlined all rights of the participants: to volunteer and to withdraw from the study at any time; to fully understand the purpose and procedures of the study; to ask questions, obtain

a copy of the results of the study, and the benefits of the study; and to have their privacy protected. Finally, this document includes the signature of the researcher to affirm the agreement between all parties involved.

Role of the Researcher

Currently, I am a teacher at the selected school who has been employed there for fifteen years. As a teacher, I have worked six years as a fourth grade teacher, four years as a fifth grade teacher, and one year as a third grade teacher. These past four years, I have been the social studies projects coordinator for research writing. Responsibilities included, teaching grades Pre-kindergarten through five, including bilingual and special education classes. I have a professional working relationship with the participants but have no supervisory obligations towards them.

As the researcher, I was an observer in the participants' classrooms, conducted a focus group, and initiated individual interviews with each participant to discuss their opinions, experiences, and perspectives on music-infusion during their respective reading and writing lessons. To preserve the integrity of the data collected, permission was acquired by obtaining informed consent from the participants and an approval from the Walden IRB in order to gain access and data from the participants.

As a teacher, I use music-infusion to motivate and enhance lessons in reading and writing. As the researcher, I documented and observed the way each teacher infused the music into their respective lessons. Additionally, I facilitated and recorded information garnered from the focus group discussions and the individual interviews. Mizener (2008), states the "Regardless of the method of literacy instruction, there is a growing body of

literature that supports specific music experiences and activities to teach and practice essential literacy learning components” (p. 11).

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The school site was selected because the researcher was aware of the use of music-infusion by the participants. In addition, the school’s annual report card reflected the need for increased academic performance levels in the content areas of language arts (New York City Department of Education, 2011). The site was also a suitable location because the gatekeeper was flexible and willing to allow innovative teaching practices that support student learning. Creswell (2003) states “participants should be selected through purposeful sampling to ensure they will best help the researcher to understand the problem and research questions” (p. 165). The participants selected were teachers in the site school who currently infuse music in their reading and writing language arts instruction.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected during the 8-week period, respectively, through interviews (See Appendix A), a focus group (See Appendix B), and observations (See Appendix C) that the researcher initiated. The documents for the study included probing and guiding questions regarding reading and writing language arts instruction. Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews, a focus group discussion, and observations. The inquiry included a teacher-generated written description of teachers’ lessons and tasks while using music-infused lessons. Since each participant was from a different residential area, they were coded by pseudo names for identification purposes.

All data were collected and analyzed by the researcher at the completion of the study. The questions posed in the interview and in the focus group consisted of open-ended questions in order to allow the participants to expand on their thoughts and perspectives.

Interviews

Guiding and probing questions were also included in the frame of the interview. “Guiding questions helped establish the purpose of the interview and probing questions encouraged the interviewee to delve deeper into the subject matter discussed” (Hatch, 2002, p. 107–109). The inquiry was unthreatening to allow the interviewees to feel comfortable. Yin (2009) stated “that an important aspect of a research case study is being able to ask good questions while realizing it is not necessarily the answers received” (p. 70). It was paramount to be a good listener. “It was important to be able to hear the exact words of the interviewee, capture the total mood and emotion, and understand the context of the information, all without showing any bias” (Yin, 2009, p. 70). “Observations were used as a way for the researcher to better understand the perspective of participants by understanding participants’ setting, culture, and social phenomenon experienced” (Hatch, 2002, p. 72).

It was important that the participants in the study felt unthreatened throughout the process, so the questions were developed with sensitivity to ensure the participants’ comfort level. Yin (2009) stated “that case study is in compliance with the protocol of an inquiry and can be accomplished when asking unthreatening questions” (p. 107). With consideration to the participants’ time availability, the face-to-face interviews lasted for about one hour and each interviewee was informed of the time expectation prior to their

scheduled interview. Hatch (2002) explained “that in order to conduct a thorough interview the duration should be one hour to 90 minutes” (p. 111). Hatch (2002) also suggested that experiences with participants in an educational setting are best kept to one hour in duration due to the busy schedules of most educators (p. 111). Each interview was electronically recorded to keep consistency with the written notes taken during the interview. Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated “interviews should be recorded to better ensure accuracy for transcription” (p. 110).

Focus Group

Hatch (2002) described a focus group as “a group of people who have similar characteristics or have share experiences” (p. 24). The focus group consisted of all of the participants and was conducted for a duration lasting 60 minutes. The purpose of the focus group was to stimulate dynamics that provoked thoughts and ideas to surface through the interaction of group discussions that otherwise might have remained dormant in the individual interviews. This group discussion focused on probing questions on the research topic. Hatch (2002) explained, “the focus should be on the topic and the fundamental data are the transcripts of the group discussion on the topic” (p. 24). The focus group discussion was recorded for later transcription. Transcribed information was shared with the participants to ensure accuracy and member checked. At any point during the group discussion a participant felt uncomfortable the discussion was halted.

Observations

As the researcher, I made observations and field notes during reading and writing language arts instruction lessons. I developed an observation protocol from the initial

analysis of the interviews and focus group. Hatch (2002) described field notes as “the unaltered data that are written down at the moment they are observed by the researcher” (p. 77). The observations of the participants were 45 minutes in duration, which aligned with the time allotted for each subject that was taught. Throughout the time I was in the classroom, it was important that, as the researcher, I remained unobtrusive and adhered to the observation protocol. I made notations of all aspects of the lesson and classroom environment. Additionally, there was an overall reflective summary of the entire experience. The observations were properly coded to protect the integrity of the observation and in accordance with the Walden University IRB regulations. All observation notes were transcribed and available for the participant’s review.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is “the process in which the researcher begins to understand and interpret the entire body of data collected from the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Data collected were from information garnered based on observations, interviews and focus group discussions of the participants’ perspectives on using music-infusion during language arts instruction as a motivational tool to support student learning. To ensure accuracy, the interviews and focus group were audio taped and transcribed. All transcriptions were shared with the participants to confirm accuracy and the findings of the data were member checked. The data were analyzed via a detailed coding system (Creswell, 2003).

The coding system was identified by chunking sentences and phrases that were relative to each other and provided meaning to the data. This was determined by the

similarities and differences of themes and patterns identified from the collected data. I coded all of the transcribed data, by hand, using color coding for similar themes and text. Coded text, of like themes, were cut and paste onto notecards and placed in separate envelopes. Data files were also created for each code that had the same labeling. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated, “Coding is the analytic process of examining data line by line or paragraph for significant events, feelings, and so on, that are then denoted as concepts” (p. 29).

Data analysis included reading through, reviewing, and reflecting each interview conducted. The analysis involved several overlapping stages: recognition, clarification, synthesis, elaboration, coding, sorting, and description. Upon completion of the transcription of collected data, member-checking of the findings, and authentication, the following steps were incorporated for data analysis:

- *Recognized* the concepts, themes, and topical markers in the interview by examining the interviews to *clarify* and explain what was meant by the concepts and themes.
- *Synthesized* and fused all of the events of the data collected to gain explicit understanding of the overall narrative.
- *Elaborating* the data created a way to take the clarified and synthesized information and created new concepts and themes.
- Because data organization was paramount, *coding* was important. Coding the data systemically by labeling the concepts, themes, and markers that allowed the ability to quickly retrieve and locate all of the data that related to similar

subject matter in each interview. Coding greatly impacted how to conclude the end of the analysis.

- Finally, data was *sorted* as a way to group all like data into a single computer file.

The culminating step was to compose a narrative to examine the similarities and differences of the data. This process was used throughout the entire data-collection process with each of the participants. Participants were each interviewed, a part of a focus group discussion, and then observed. Initial data analysis occurred after iteration of data collection. During the research process, it is recommended to have a backup file. This back up was deleted when the study was complete. When the study was completed, all paper, audio, and electronic records of data, was stored on a flash drive, and will remain kept in a locked storage cabinet in my home for a period of five years; then it will be destroyed.

Validity and Trustworthiness of the Study

All data collected were checked for validity and accuracy. This was accomplished by incorporating research-proposal strategies. Creswell (2003) recommended the use of a combination of strategies using triangulation; member checking; rich, thick description; and clarifying bias. Triangulating the different data, the researcher used a cross section of sources as a means to justify the information and prove accuracy. Post data collection; all transcribed information was shared with each participant for accuracy and member checked. Member checking allowed the researcher to share the results of the data with each individual participant and sought their views about their individual parts in the

study, for credibility of the account and accuracy of the interpretations of the data. Providing rich, thick descriptions enabled the readers of the completed study to more vividly make connection with the experiences of the participants of the study.

This study incorporated a triangulated format: interviews, a focus group, and observations. Using this research strategy, helped to establish validity of the multiple sources used in the data-collection process. Merriam (2002) explained “that triangulation is a strategy used by researchers to confirm the internal validity of the study, which is the strength of qualitative research” (p. 25).

Summary

For this study, a qualitative case-study design was utilized to interview, focus group, and observe four to seven teachers in an elementary school, to examine and analyze the perceptions teachers have regarding using a music-infused lessons during reading and writing language arts instruction. The data were collected and analyzed using the recommended strategies of triangulation; member checking; providing rich, thick descriptions; and clarifying the bias of the researcher.

Section 4 describes the implementation and discussion of the actual study. In this section are goals of the study and a review of the literature addressing the study. Additionally, it includes a thorough discussion and description of the study. The focus was on the implementation of the instructional approach and the results that evolve from a music-infused lesson during reading and writing language arts instruction, on the students, from the participants’ perspective. Section 5 includes the why and how the

study was done, interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for action.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perspectives about using music infusion in language arts instruction. Constructivism was used as the framework for the research format. This section includes the methods used for obtaining the data, how it was recorded, the analysis of the collected data, and a brief description of each participant. The data for this study were collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and individual classroom observations. In this section, I discuss the analysis of the data collected from teachers using this instructional approach while teaching language arts. Additionally, all data were member checked by the participants for validity. Data collected during the study were coded based on the similarities in sentences and phrases (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Based on the similarities, four themes emerged: motivation, attitude, sustained attention ability, and retention.

Participants

Participants for this study were selected using purposeful sampling. Each participant selected was given a pseudonym to ensure their confidentiality. All four of the selected participants were females with more than 10 years of teaching experience in both the site and the education system.

Participant Introduction

Participant X had taught at the same school, the site school, for 13 years. During this time she taught four different grades: first grade for 3 years, second grade for 1 year, kindergarten for 8 years, and 1 year as a Social Studies teacher. Demographically,

Participant X had a class of 22 students. Most of the students were Latino and male. Performance wise, Participant X reported that the majority of the students were considered Level 2, which meant they were approaching the state standards level.

Participant Y had been teaching for 14 years. During these years, she taught at the site school for 13 years in various grades. Prior to teaching at the site school, she taught for 1 year as a paraprofessional. At the site school, she had consistently been teaching the second grade for 12 years, except for 1 year when she was the library facilitator. The participant had a large class with 17 boys and 9 girls. The majority of the students were Hispanic and their academic performance levels varied. Most of the students were considered Level 2. Participant Y reported that based on the state standards, the students were approaching grade level.

Participant Z had taught for 15 years, all of which have been at the site school. During these years, she taught 3 years in the fourth grade, 2 years as a second grade teacher, and the past 10 years as a third grade teacher. This participant had 29 students in the classroom, of which 99% were Hispanic. Participant Z reported that the students' academic performance levels were varied, but the majority of the students were considered Level 2. Additionally, Participant Z further reported that based on the state standards, the students were approaching grade level.

Participant A had been teaching for 13 years as a fifth grade teacher. At the beginning of her teaching career, she taught as a first grade teacher, and during the past 13 years she had also taught both third and fourth grades as a summer school and after school teacher. This participant had a smaller class than the other participants. There

were 19 students in the class and 11 of them were boys. Participant A also reported that most of these students were English language learners of Hispanic descent. Additionally, according to the state standard, academically, the students performed at Level 2, which was approaching the grade level.

Data Collection Process

To commence the data collection process, a signed letter of cooperation (Appendix D) from the principal from the site school was obtained. An application was submitted to the Walden University IRB for approval to initiate a research study. Upon approval from the Walden University IRB (approval number 12-09-13-0111901), the initial contact was made with the potential participants at the monthly scheduled faculty meeting. After introducing and explaining the study, I circulated a list for interested volunteers to sign up as potential participants. Potential participants were selected from those volunteers who had been teaching a minimum of 10 years and were currently using music infusion during lesson instruction. The prospective participants were given a letter of consent and asked to return it signed within 3 days.

The data collection began mid-December and continued through mid-March. Due to several extreme weather conditions, scheduled dates with participants had to be shifted many times. Initially, after the introductory meeting about the study, five teachers volunteered for the study. However, one volunteer did not complete the consent form and effectively dropped out of the study. The four participants were teachers in kindergarten, second grade, third grade, and fifth grade.

Following the confirmation of the participants' willingness to be interviewed, individual, face-to-face interviews were scheduled with each one based on her availability. The interviews began in January 2014 and were held in the actual classroom of each participant, after regular school hours. The interview questions were developed and scripted prior to any of the interviews (Appendix A). Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to 60 minutes and each participant was asked to explain or clarify responses when necessary. The questions for the interview were both guided and probing questions. I audio-recorded the interviews and took copious notes to ensure accuracy of the raw data being collected.

Each interview began with introductory and background questions that focused on years of teaching experience, demographics about the classroom as per its cultural make-up, size, gender ratio, and student performance levels. In addition, questions were asked about the participants' musical training, their music genre preference, and the frequency with which their students were exposed to music during the school week. The primary probing questions were designed to delve into the manner in which the participants used music in their classrooms, their perceptions of student reactions and attitudes during lessons when music was infused into the instruction, the participants' perspectives on using music infused lesson as opposed to a traditional format, and how music-infused lessons aligned with the academic rigor prescribed by the new common core curriculum standards.

The next round of data were collected through a focus group of all four participants. In mid- February, I contacted each participant individually to schedule a date

for the focus group discussion. Each participant agreed to a mutual date for the discussion to take place. The group met in my office after regular school instructional hours. The questions for the focus group were predetermined and scripted (Appendix B). The 40-minute discussion required each participant to respond to each question to stimulate dynamics that could provoke thoughts and ideas to surface through the interaction of group discussions that may have otherwise remained dormant in individual interviews. The questions delved into the participants' definition of music infusion, their experiences from using music-infusion as a teaching approach, and their perspectives regarding the effectiveness and challenges that evolve from using music infusion as a teaching method. I took intricate notes to also include the nonverbal expressions and body language of the participants as questions were asked and responses were shared. The notes were used in conjunction with the audio recording to further ensure accuracy of the data garnered from the focus group.

The final round of data were garnered through unobtrusive observations of the participants in their authentic classroom settings. The observations were prescheduled with the participants' permission and were 45 minutes in duration, which was the allotted time for the subject to be taught. The purpose of the observations was to allow me as the researcher to see the participants' execution of a music-infused language arts lesson. All observations were documented using the observation protocol (Appendix C) template.

All responses for the individual interviews and focus group were audio recorded. Copious notes were taken by me to ensure accuracy of the data gleaned from the interviews, focus group, and observations. Additionally, all data were transcribed from

the audio cassettes and kept confidential via coding and secured in a locked file in my home. Member checking was used to allow participants to review a written synopsis of the findings for accuracy and to establish validity of the data collected (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

Coding was inductive; data analysis allowed me to look for patterns and themes in the collected data in order to organize and make general statements about the data garnered (Hatch, 2002). Upon completion of the data collection process, the data were read several times in order to determine codes that would best categorize the information gleaned. From the coding process, four major themes evolved that addressed the research question. The data from the individual interviews, focus group, and observations revealed themes related to the students' motivation, attitude, sustained attention ability, and retention.

Theme 1: Motivation

During the interview process, particular questions stimulated responses connected to the research question regarding what are teachers' perspectives about infusing music into language arts instruction. The responses given by the participants directly addressed the theme of motivation. Based on a few of the probing questions presented on the interview guide (Appendix A) and the focus group discussion (Appendix B), participants explained their perspectives about how they felt music provided a conduit to motivate their respective students.

This theme of motivation emerged from multiple participant responses. For example, Participant Z shared that she incorporates music into her daily teaching routine in a way that she hopes motivates students:

It seems that at some time during my day, I use my tambourine with the chimes hanging from it. I sing a spontaneously, made up song or two, in the moment, where I am shaking the tambourine around and it's my way of encouraging and motivating my students when they are tackled with certain tasks during the day.

Participant X explained how her students would become so motivated and attitudes quickly change in a positive way when music is played during her reading and writing language arts lessons. She stated,

My students get so excited! They quickly get ready because they want to begin. Like for instance when we are going to begin our morning routine of learning to recognize the spelling of the months of the year or the days of the week, the children know the song and the movements we are about to do and immediately you see them perk up. Whenever music is not played during lesson, I notice a change in their body language. They look forward to the music. They get restless.

Participant Y stated, "It [music] helped them to stay on task. They are more upbeat, more alive, they are more in tune. Some kids who would normally take longer (on a task), it puts them in the mood most of the time to complete their tasks."

When Participant Y was asked about the motivation and attitude observed when music is not played during a language arts lesson, Participant Y stated,

“Some of my students are more rambunctious. The music makes them talk a lot less. They don’t focus as fast. I needed music today! (laugh)” Participant Z stated, “The students were ready to tackle the lesson of the day without apprehension. And well, when music is not a part of the lesson students were always less engaged.” Participant A stated,

The interest level is always high. The sluggish and fatigued body language disappears. They (students) present themselves with challenges to show how well they could handle the English language by trying to learn all the words or re-mixing the lyrics to create a song of their own.

The theme of motivation also arose during the focus group discussion as a result of two of the questions asked. The responses to question #4, what has been the most rewarding experience from using this approach in language arts lessons. Participant Z quickly replied,

When you see children take ownership of their learning. The children come up with a song of their own, sometimes, and they share it at home. For example, I have students who come up with a song and then the next thing you know they say I learned that from my sister or some other relative, This would be a song they came up with to relate to the lesson when they want to go home and try to emulate something learned during the lessons when I played music.

Participant A said, “It’s a testing strategy too! My kids remember certain things about the lesson from the song that was played with that lesson.” Participant Y said, “I just love seeing how excited even my more distracted students can tune into the lesson

whenever there is some sort of music involved during the instruction time.” Participant A furthered explained,

As a result of what I have done in language arts lessons, I had kids who were having difficulty with division problems and I taught my kids a dance movement that helps them to remember the division process too. You can actually see them doing the dance as they try to solve the problems.

During the focus group discussion, participants shared the different ways each one felt their teaching practices improved through the use of music-infusion in their language arts instruction. The responses given by the participants also aligned with D’Agrosa (2008) asserted support for music-infusion in literacy lessons as a pre-reading skill. The researcher further explained that recitation of rhymes and singing songs as a group often encourages shy students to join in. This increases their level of confidence and motivates them to participate in language-arts lessons. Participant X said, “My children retain information more while they are learning.” Participant A replied, “They [students] are more apt to participate.” Participant Y stated, “They [students] are more engaged than with pen, paper, and graphic organizers. They are bored out of their minds with that stuff.” Participant Z said, “It’s fun and my students are happier.”

During a classroom observation, in Participant Y’s classroom, the language arts lesson was launched by playing a song *Ground Hog* (Seegar, 1955). As the song played, the participant asked the students to listen to the song and write as many details about the story which was read the day before. At the conclusion of the song, Participant Y asked the students to submit their written work. After the lesson, Participant Y stated, “I wasn’t

sure how they (students) would react to such an old song, but they really got into it! And the work I received from them was amazing! They actually produced really good details!”

The responses of the participants were significant to this study. From their perspectives, music has the ability to transform which further supports other research. Sacks (2008) argued for music’s transformative abilities to change and trigger mental abilities in humans that take place in the person as a result of musical stimulation.

Theme 2: Retention

After a close analysis of the data garnered from the participants’, the theme of retention also emerged. Each participant talked extensively, in their interviews and focus group discussion, about reactions they noticed in their students and how they seemed to retain more from a lesson when music was infused in the context of the instruction.

Participant X said,

You can see my kids really trying to remember all parts of the lesson and it becomes really evident after that. The kids often go home and share the song with their mother or whichever parent is in the home. I know this because they [parents] will come to me during a dismissal or a morning drop-off and tell me how they learned about something their child learned because of a certain song their child taught to them at home.

Participant A said,

Oh, boy! I get all types of reactions! Some will be smiling or head-bopping. Some may be banging a beat on the desk. Then, there are some who are attempting to

learn the lyrics or attempting to prove how much of it they may already know by reciting it or singing along. It's all over the place. (smile)

The responses the participants' shared during their interview about their students' reactions and behaviors align with the research by Flohr (2006, 2010) which stated that music has the ability to enrich all the core subjects taught to children and additionally meet special learners' needs. Music supports the child's total learning environment by enhancing literature, language arts, mathematics, science, transitions, and the theater arts.

Participant Z replied, "Oh, they start singing along, popping, and snapping and then even call for me to play selections at times that they love. It is using mnemonics you know to create memory aid, short rhythms for helping to retain information." Participant Y stated,

It all depends on what's going on. Sometimes they are singing, or clapping, or swaying. Sometimes the music can be kind of funny, especially since right now we are focused on farms, so the kids may start to laugh, but then they calm down and then they settle down and they get into it and they get into the lesson. It helps them to focus more on the lesson tasks.

Marzano (2003) stated that, "nonlinguistic representation allows students to generate mental images representing content, act out content, draw pictures or pictographs representing content" (p .82). This statement became evident in the data gathered during the interview process. Participants shared their perspectives on how using music-infused lessons in their language arts instruction as opposed to a traditional instructional format, also stimulated better retention in their students. Participant Z stated,

My perspective is that it is all based on mnemonics...like the definition says [of the word mnemonics] it is a systematic instructional strategy to help improve retaining information. It connects new learning to prior knowledge through the use of visual or acoustic cues. It can help modify to fit different learning needs. It enhances memory and better retention.

Gipe (2002) suggested, "Music provides opportunities for students who experience difficulty with reading and writing to think and learn through another language that is repetitive, melodious, and emotional" (p. 371). Participant A said, "You know (pause) working with an ELL population calls for looking for many ways to teach and work with words in English in order to improve reading, writing, and speaking the language. Participant X replied, "It enhances learning and makes learning more fun! It helps them to retain a lot of what I teach." These participants' declarations parallel with the assertion by Gipe (2002). Responding in great depth when replying to this question, Participant Y stated,

Humm...? That's a really hard question! Humm...? Let me think...well, first of all, if I could, I would because it sets the tone! Students would always come into a calm setting. I say that because language arts is always the first content subject that I teach and so they would always enter a calm setting. When they come in with music as a backdrop for a lesson it's like music in a theatre. My audience is immediately drawn in. This is when you notice them ready to learn! And it sticks!! You see, I always feel like I am performing on stage when I teach and the

music just sets it up. It just makes it! The regular curriculum environment is hum-drum, dull, and boring. Music livens it up a lot!

As a result of data collected during the focus group discussion, participants explained how using hip-hop rhythms as a technique seemed to boost their students' retention ability. Analyzing the data, I noticed a relationship between the participants' responses and the research studies, conducted by Strickland and Morrow (2006), who asserted that because children love to sing, it is a catalyst that can be used to help develop their reading and writing skills. Participant A stated, "It [hip-hop rhythms] really helps with my ELL population [English Language Learners] learn language." Participant Y said, "It gives my students the opportunity to express themselves about what they learned a lot better." Participant X replied, "It gives them an outlet and the lesson sticks."

Participant Z said,

Since we all come from Africa, the drums and beats connect and that connection is what helps them to focus and remember what the lesson is teaching them."

Participant A concluded the discussion on this question and said, As a matter of fact, the principal had us [5th grade] to launch the poetry unit last year [2013] using Tupac. The year before, she knew of my use of rap music. I told her I used Tupac because the kids can make lots of connection because they look up to rappers and the music had messages that were pretty deep, but it [lyrics] helped them to connect with themselves and they were able to better connect and retain the lesson skill I was hoping they would grasp. And as a result they did! So she

was so impressed, she asked me to burn additional CDs for the entire grade for this year. Hey, it works!

During the classroom observations, in two cases the participants both used a track from the video CD entitled, *Flocabulary* (2014) for their lesson. Participant Z used the music as a motivational warm-up prior to the lesson. The teacher allowed the students, who were very animated as the rap music played, to enjoy the music as they prepared their notebook and sharpened pencils, as she assembled and organized the materials she needed for her forth-coming lesson. Students sang the chorus lines to the songs they were familiar and chatted with their neighbors with until the teacher counted to three. Immediately the teacher expected the silence that followed and she commenced with the lesson.

Participant A asked the students if they knew songs that taught them about something. Students volunteered in game such responses as the ABC song and the 123 song. She asked each student to explain what they've learned from each song. One student replied the song helped them to remember the letters of the alphabet. Another student mentioned that the 123 song helped them learn how to count. The teacher began to play the *Flocabulary* (2014) music video. The video uses hip hop music and rhythms to explain the main idea. The video used was entitled "Bear Facts" and "The First Day of School" to teach the components of the main idea of the paragraph. Throughout the video the narrator would ask the question, with choral replies to: "What is the subject? What are the details?" This was the chance for the students to also join in choral response with the video.

Theme 3: Sustained Attention

There were questions, throughout my interview, that sparked responses that strongly expressed how the participants' students seem to sustain their attention longer during language arts lessons when music is infused versus when music is not infused as a part of the lesson structure. Teaching challenging and rigorous lessons were also easier for the participants because the students were more focused. Overall, the participants felt that their music infused lessons made learning a more memorable experience for their students.

Participant Z said, "They [students] were always less engaged. Participant X replied, "My students look forward to the music entities. And when it's not there, I quickly notice how they become restless and distant." Participant Y said, "Some of my students are more rambunctious. The music makes them talk a lot less. They don't focus as fast. I needed music today! (laugh)" Participant A also stated, "Well, what I observed is that the students simply prepared their notebooks with a heading anticipating a note-taking session. No real focus was on understanding the skill or strategy being presented."

In relationship with the new Common Core State Standards (2010), in the focus group discussion, participants agreed that music infusion aligns with the academic rigor prescribed in the new standards. Participant Z explained, "Absolutely! Because when you work in some of the content areas it deals with multi-learning styles and that's how the student is able to learn." Participant Y had a similar response as Participant Z saying,

Yes! They could be because it touches on different learning styles. It hits the learning senses and the students that have difficulties staying in touch with the

lesson or in tune with the lesson the music beats help them to understand. It jars something in them.

Participant A replied,

Rigor presents challenges! That's trying to get the students to take their knowledge to the next level. Therefore, including music into the lessons provides students with the opportunity to enjoy them [the lessons], BUT also question themselves about things they don't understand. They will do the research to find out what it means because they want to make sure they are singing the song with the correct words. The research could be something as simple as asking a friend / classmate. That is rigor. They are inquiring the unknown on their own.

Additionally, songs are remembered much longer than notes taken in a notebook. Music focuses their attention and by teaching a skill through music, students will have songs internally stored and can retrieve them whenever it is needed to complete an assignment in the future.

These responses all connected to the theory posed by Catterall (2002). The theory suggested a "transfer of learning" explaining that, "Transfer denotes instances where learning in one context assists learning in a different context" (p.151). One example of this I was able to observe during the classroom observation of Participant A. Participant A's lesson focused on the skill of identifying main idea and supportive details in a text. The lesson was introduced through the use of the video CD entitled *Flocabulary* (2014) with a song focused on main idea. Students enthusiastically joined in singing the chorus. The chorus lyrics were, "Listen up, lend me an ear. The hot new thing is the main idea.

Supported by the details to keep it all clear; the main ideas' the reason that we're all here. Yeah, come on!"

After the video played, Participant A continued the lesson with a discussion about a class trip they had taken earlier that day. After about 20 minutes, the students were then given a task to work with a partner to write down what the student felt was the main idea of the trip and to write relevant details that would support that main idea. The students then worked for 20 minutes on that task and then each partnership was allowed to share their work. There was no point during the observation that Participant A had to direct students to stay on task or to focus on their assignment. Having the ability to capture and sustain the attention of their students was a commonality I observed throughout each participant's classroom observation. Participant A explained,

When I play the music as a part of my lessons, I find that I very rarely find myself having to keep students on task. They just seem to do it! That's why I always use it (music)." Students keep their focus and get the work done. Mission accomplished!

Throughout the focus group discussion, the participants continued to express their passion for using music-infusion to teach language arts. The participants responded, "For it!" when asked their feelings if it became mandatory for teachers to implement music-infusion as a part of their language arts lesson development. The participants said, "It would keep the fun in learning and make learning more memorable." Participant Y capsulized the collective responses of the participants.

It would change the way we [teachers] teach so that it's not boring! That is why other communities are killing us in scores. It's not what they are teaching, but it's the way they teach. Like you said [participants] it keeps the fun and that's what we are missing. We have to have fun. That's why I sing, I dance, and I clap. This is who I am. I need it for myself and to help motivate my class. They enjoy it and the kids come to school wanting to learn.

Theme 4: Attitude

Participants shared how infusing music in their reading/writing language arts instruction created positive changes in their students' attitudes and behaviors. Their responses unite with the assertions of Darrow (2008) and Smith (2000) who both suggest that teachers must strive to be more innovative in their pedagogical approach in order to provide the type of learning environment that served to encourage and motivate students to learn. Participant Z said,

I do hand rhythms for kinesthetic and to discourage bad behavior and moods. Again, I incorporate it [music] when I feel I need to encourage, engage, and to motivate. It could be shaking chimes. I think that this type of kinesthetic and auditory learning is a key component to get kids to take ownership of their educational career.

Participant A replied, "Music has been infused in my poetry lessons. Poetry touches the emotions and so does music, so it is a great blend and just does something to my students overall mood." Participant Y explained, "Well, I usually try to use it as background music to kind of motivate them and relax them. Like right now, we are doing

a lot of reading about farms so I use songs that are about farms for those lessons. So it depends on the curriculum.”

Additional evidence of how the participants noticed positive attitude and behavior in their students was eye-witnessed by me during the classroom observations. The observation for Participant X was scheduled for the first period of the day. Participant X asked the students to quickly unpack their bags and assemble on their individual floor spot. Participant X began by simply pointing to the calendar on the wall and counted out loud, “One, two, and three!” The students began to sing a song parody about the days of the week. As a part of the song, Participant X also had the students to follow her in dance movements that align with parts of their body. This song was sung twice. Following that song, immediately, they began to sing another song about the months of the year. This song was accompanied with hand movements and rhythm changes throughout the jingle. This song had a class leader and was sung in a call and response style.

In each song, the students were not just singing the names days of the week and months of the year, but they also had to spell each of the words. Participant X said, “I infuse it [music] in language arts to teach the days of the week, months of the year, and morning phonics word blends. It really sets them up and somewhat calms them at the start of the day.”

Three of the four participants stated in their interviews that their respective classes receive music instruction from the school’s music teacher only once a week and that their students look forward to the interaction. The fourth participant’s class does not receive music at all. They further stated that the music instruction is mostly sing-along style and

includes some rhythmic movements. Additionally, the participants said that music instruction is mostly based on grade level curriculum in the area of language arts and social studies and is given through vocal and recorded music, but does not include any instrumentation. Participant A stated,

My class gets music from the music cluster teacher who visits one time per week for 45 minutes. So to make sure I have music in my class every day, during the school day, to keep them motivated, I do transitional exercises to focus on rhythm coordination. When we do transitional exercises I play different types of up-beat music.

Discrepant and Nonconforming Data

After reviewing the data I collected, nonconforming and discrepant statements did surface. Participants discussed some of the challenges that inhibit their use of music-infusion during their language arts instruction; however, each participant regularly uses music during their lessons. One participant expressed challenges she has encountered. Participant A stated,

I haven't used it lately because of test prep for the New York State English Language Arts and Math Exams. And not only that, there are some things in the new curriculum (Common Core Curriculum) we (as a grade team) haven't introduced yet. I haven't even had the time, considering we are preparing for the test, but after the test I plan to find some music I can use to introduce the unit.

The state exams the participant was referring to are only administered to students in grades three through eight. Participant X and Participant Y do not teach students in that

grade range, but Participant Z does. Participant Z responded to the same question and replied, “I keep using it, so nothing inhibits me.” Additionally, Participant Y said, “Well, I’m always clapping, dancing, you whoo-ing or something and my kids must get ready for their DIBELS exams, but I don’t care.”

The reason for this discrepancy may be because Participant A has students who are in the 5th grade and are the senior students in the school. She further expressed that these students will graduate from the school in June and she must endure the pressure of ensuring these students meet promotional criteria, which is incrementally different from promotional criteria for children in the grades Kindergarten through 2nd grade. The students in those grades are promoted based on student work not high stakes tests. The New York State exams are high stakes tests that can impede a student’s ability to be promoted or graduate if they do not pass them. Though the state exams are also a part of the mandated promotional criteria for 3rd grade students, Participant Z expressed that she does not allow the pressures of the exams interfere with her ability to keep music as a part of daily teaching practices as indicated by her responses.

Although there was a discrepancy found in the focus group discussion data, in aggregate, the data showed that the participants all agreed that the use of music-infusion was an integral entity in their language arts instructional practices. The participants’ views expressed their desire to use music in their language arts lessons to enhance their students learning. There were no discrepant comments noticed during the interview or observation data collected.

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes

There was a consistency in the patterns and themes garnered from the data in this study. The four themes uncovered in this study were: motivation, retention, sustained attention, and attitude. The participants mentioned these terms directly or indirectly in response to questions during the interview and focus group discussion. Additionally, these were also noticed in the observations. Each of the participants shared similar positive perspectives concerning using music-infusion in language arts instruction. They each agreed that it helps to motivate their students causing them to retain the skills and information being taught in a lesson. The participants also agreed that using music keeps the students' sustained attention causing them to be more focused during instructional time. The final benefit is the participants notice that their students' attitudes and moods are much better when music is a part of their lessons. The improved attitudes resulted in the students displaying better behavior during those particular lessons.

The only negative side of infusing music into lessons that was expressed by the participants is the fact they needed more resources to ensure their ability to be able to consistently use music in every lesson. In the upper grade level classes, the participants are challenged with preparing their students for the high stakes state exams. This preparation period becomes an obstacle for the participants to successfully implement music-infused lessons. Overall, the participants felt they foster positive academic performance in their students as a result of this method of teaching.

Evidence of Quality

The data collection process followed the required protocol to ensure validity all of the information gleaned. The data were triangulated using individual interviews, a focus group, and individual observations. All data were transcribed and coded based on repeated responses that were then identified as themes. Each participant was given the opportunity to member review a written synopsis of the findings of the data collected for accuracy and credibility of the interpreted findings (Creswell, 2008). Once data were member checked, there were no corrections required. In addition, to ensure credibility, thick, rich, and detailed descriptions were used to describe the setting, participants, and themes in this study (Creswell, 2008).

Summary

Section 4 was a summary of the entire data collection process for the study. The section included an introduction of each participant and how each one was confirmed as a volunteer for this study. This section also included the findings from the individual interviews, focus group discussion, and the classroom observations conducted. Additionally, this section gave a detailed data analysis of the data collected.

Each participant expressed their views on using music-infusion for language arts instruction. The participants all agreed that using music-infusion in language arts instruction has been paramount in their instructional practices. The music-infused lessons motivated their students, helped the students to retain more information, increased their sustained attention, and provoked a better attitude/mood in the learner during

instructional time. There was only one discrepancy found in the data regarding things that may inhibit the participants from using music-infusion as a part of a lesson plan.

Section 5 presented an in-depth, detailed discussion of the research question presented in the study. This section also presented the limitations encountered in the study and recommendations for future research on this topic.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perspectives about using music infusion in language arts instruction. Constructivism was used as the framework for the research format. A case study methodology was the format for the study. Triangulation was used for data collection and the data for this study were collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and unobtrusive individual classroom observations. In addition, the findings from the collected data were member checked by the participants for their credibility and validity. The data collected during the study were also coded based on the similarities in sentences and phrases. There were four themes that emerged through the data collection process: motivation, attitude, sustained attention ability, and retention. The four participants selected were female teachers from kindergarten, second, third, and fifth grades. Each participant taught at the same school site and had more than 10 years of teaching experience at the selected site and in the public education system.

Guiding the study was the following question: What are the perspectives of teachers who use music-infused lesson as an instructional approach to enhance reading and writing? The findings of the study showed that the teachers felt similarly about the use of music-infusion as a pedagogical method to enhance their language arts lessons. The teachers all agreed that they noticed a positive change in their students' behaviors and productivity when music was used as a part of their lesson structure.

The study was based on the constructivist paradigm of Gardner (1983) theory of the multiple intelligences. In the theory of the multiple intelligences, Gardner discussed

the phenomenon of the eight multiple intelligences (learning styles) an individual can embody. This study focused on one of these intelligences as the learning style that connects with arts, more specifically the art of music. The findings identified both the successes and challenges these teachers experienced with implementing this teaching method.

Four themes emerged as a result of the data collected. The themes were motivation, attitude, sustained attention ability, and retention. In the following sections, I discuss how each of the themes addressed the research question.

Findings

The findings from this study were significant to the research question: What are teachers' perspectives about using music infusion in language arts instruction? Individual interviews allowed the participants to share their perspectives about different aspects of using music-infusion during their language arts lessons. The focus group discussion was a way to document the commonalities and differences among the participants based on their experiences with music-infusion as an instructional practice. The observations were in the actual classroom setting of each participant in order to more closely see how they used music in their lessons.

Each participant used music either within the context of the lesson or as a way to begin the lesson. Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2013) explained, "The manner in which a class begins can entice and motivate children to learn" (p. 41). The results of the findings showed that whether it is recorded music, hand-clapping, rhythms, instruments, or

singing, each participant used some form of music in their language arts lessons and continued to use this method as a part of their daily teaching practices.

Theme 1: Motivation

One major theme that emerged was motivation. Researchers Jensen (2008), Reeves (2007), and Strickland and Morrow (2006) documented how a well-designed music-infused program can stimulate and motivate changes in a student's performance levels in many different ways. The participants each reflected on how their music-infused lesson stimulated and motivated their students. Participant Y said, "I just love seeing how excited even my more distracted students can tune into the lesson whenever there is some sort of music involved during the instruction time." Criss (2011) explained, "An effective teacher can create motivation in students by forming relationships and stimulating the affective domain" (p. 1). Similarly, Participant Z stated, "The students were ready to tackle the lesson of the day without apprehension." The participants also explained how their students seemed to lack motivation when music was not infused in a lesson. Participant Z's comments connected with an assertion of Cooper (2010), who claimed, "Children who are immersed in music and language are more prepared to listen, more receptive and alert, and more active in their responses" (p. 24). Participant X stated, "Whenever music is not played during lesson, I notice a change in their body language. They look forward to the music. They get restless." According to Graham (2005), "Although a variety of variables can affect performance levels in language arts, lack of interest and motivation in the classroom are among the leading causes" (p.587-590).

Theme 2: Retention

A second theme to emerge was regarding retention. Sacks (2008) argued for music's transformative abilities to change and trigger mental abilities in humans. In the study, the participants indicated times where their students often retained information from those lessons that had music infused within the lesson structure. Participant X expressed,

I know this [that my students retain a lesson] because they [parents] will come to me during a dismissal or a morning drop-off and tell me how they learned about something their child learned because of a certain song their child taught to them at home.

Participant Z also reflected on this point, stating, "My perspective is that it is all based on mnemonics. It connects new learning to prior knowledge through the use of visual or acoustic cues." Bellisario and Donovan (2012) stated, "Teachers report that arts integration stimulates deep learning, creates increased student engagement, and cultivates students' investment in learning" (p. 1).

Theme 3: Sustained Attention Ability

The next theme was sustained attention ability. Cooper (2010) explained, "The sounds and foundational structures of reading and singing provide young children with successful pathways for advancing language skills and increasing memory and attention span" (p. 24). The findings from the study showed that students in the participants' classes were much more attentive during lessons when music was within the context of the lesson. Researchers McBrien and Brandt (1997) asserted that the brain is

continuously in search of patterns, meanings, and connections. An unthreatening environment allows for the type of authentic learning that increases the brain's ability to make connections and preserve information. Participant A stated, "Music focuses their attention and by teaching a skill through music students will have songs internally stored and can retrieve them whenever it is needed to complete an assignment in the future." Eschrich, Munte, and Attenmueller (2008) confirmed that listening to music, even in a passive state, activates many psychological functions such as emotion, memory, attention, and imagery in the brain network.

Theme 4: Attitude

The final theme addressed the teachers' perception of the attitude of students when music-infused language arts lessons were used for instruction. Educational researchers Strickland and Morrow (2006) asserted that because children love to sing, it is a catalyst that can be used to help develop their reading and writing skills. Participant X said, "I infuse it [music] in language arts to teach the days of the week, months of the year, and morning phonics word blends. It really sets them up and somewhat calms them at the start of the day." This further supported Gipe (2002) claim that "Music provides opportunities for students who experience difficulty with reading and writing to think and learn through another language that is repetitive, melodious, and emotional" (p. 371). Participant A replied, "Music has been infused in my poetry lessons. Poetry touches the emotions and so does music, so it is a great blend and just does something to my students overall mood." Music-infused lessons can inspire students to write by creating a

stimulating feeling and a nonthreatening environment that promotes a reassuring attitude to achieve (Graham & Harris, 2002).

In conclusion, the findings revealed through this study agreed with the opinions of other theorists and research educators who measure the value of motivation, retention, sustained attention ability, and attitude in a learning environment. Jensen (1998) stated, “studies have shown that a student, when properly motivated, can improve their intellectual quotient by as much as twenty points in a proper learning environment” (p. 1). The participants’ responses consistently affirmed the increase in the academic performance levels of their students as a result of their increased motivation.

Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2013) asserted, “Music’s powerful role offers compelling reasons for its inclusion in schools” (p. 3). The participants also stated that students improved their retention of the taught information in their music-infused lessons; how attentive and focused the students were throughout the lesson instruction. Their experiences parallel the beliefs of theoreticians in psychology and education. In *Readings on the Development of Children*, Vygotsky (1978) explained that according to Thorndike (1978),

Theoreticians in psychology and education believe that every particular response acquisition directly enhances overall ability in equal measure. Teachers believed and acted on the basis of the theory that the mind in a complex of abilities, powers of observation, attention, memory/retention, thinking, and that any improvements in any specific ability results in general improvements in all abilities (p. 36)

This assertion can also relate to the positive changes the participants noticed in their students' attitudes when music-infused language arts lessons were implemented.

“Common outcomes for intervention include changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors.” (Chinman, Imm, & Wandersman, 2004, p. 116). The music infused lessons, as an alternative teaching method is the intervention tool used, resulting in improved levels of motivation, retention, sustained attention ability, and attitudes in their students.

Implications for Social Change

The findings from this qualitative case study support positive social change for the site school. Additionally, it also implies positive social change for other schools that may be in need of alternative pedagogical methods that can potentially help to improve academic progress in students. In *Education Week*, Robelen (2012) stated, “As educators nationwide seek to help students meet the demands of the Common Core in language arts, many arts advocates are making the case that the arts can be a valuable partner” (p. 1). Furthermore, the findings suggest that music-infused language arts lessons are beneficial and can assist in bolstering learning in children. The data supported improvements in the students' motivation, retention, sustained attention ability, and attitude during their language arts instruction. The triangulated data was collected through individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and individual observations, of the participants, in their authentic classroom settings. In each case, the participants all expressed and experienced similar positive results.

The problem presented in the literature review focused on the main focus of the NCLB (2002), which is to strengthen and increase the literacy development of America's

children. However, according to the NAEP (2007), New York State's literacy rates still ranked below the nationwide proficiency level. It is because of the low ranking, teachers have been challenged with the need to develop strategies and teaching methods to ensure their students meet State standards.

The site school for this study is a Title I school and in accordance with the NCLB (2001), Title I schools are mandated to have each of their students reach 100% proficiency in language arts by the 2013-2014 academic school year (New York City Department of Education, 2010a). The participants in this study have all used music-infused language arts lessons as an alternative method to help increase literacy in their classes. The participants each infused music into their language arts lessons differently, but have each experienced positive changes in their students. The music-infused lessons bolstered motivation, retention, sustained attention ability, and attitude, in their students, resulting in positive improvements in their students' academic performance levels.

Based on the research question, what are teachers' perceptions about infusing music in language arts instruction?; the results of this qualitative case study can bring about social change at their school and other schools at large. Marzano (2003) stated, "A teacher-level factor that affects student achievement is instructional practices" (p. 78). These participants believe that music infusion is a powerful tool that should be used as an alternative method to help improve the language arts skills in students. The Leadership Paradigms (2009) stated,

Social change builds community-based responses that address underlying social problems on an individual, institutional, community, national and/or international

level. Social change can change attitudes, behaviors, laws, policies and institutions to better reflect values of inclusion, fairness, diversity and opportunity. Social change involves a collective action of individuals who are closest to the social problem to develop solutions that address social issues.

Through this study, I witnessed evidence of such change from the successes each individual participant found by creating and implementing music-infused language arts lessons. In each case, the participants achieved positive improvements in their motivation, retention, sustained attention ability, and attitude, thus increasing their students' academic performance levels. These improvements move the participants closer to having their students meet the mandated State standards. This would suggest that music-infused lessons would be one means for acquiring social change in their learning community.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the data analysis of this qualitative case study, which encompassed the data from the individual interviews, the focus group discussion, and individual classroom observations, I developed a list of the following recommendations for the site school.

- Administrators might provide opportunities for the teachers to share their different experiences and approaches used when implementing music infusion in their language arts lessons with the entire teaching staff at the school.
“Provide educators multiple opportunities to develop deeper understanding of the content and strategies necessary to improve teaching” (Hirsh, 2009, p. 71).

- Administrators might allow teachers more flexibility, in grade level curriculum development, to create some music-infused lessons that would align with each unit of study.
- Administrators might discuss with teachers what they would need to further assist them with executing music-infused lessons.
- Administrators might create a collegial coaching team of teachers who would be able to mentor teachers who may need periodic assistance with developing and implementing music-infused lessons that will meet the needs of their particular class of students. Hirsh (2009) explained, “Create opportunities for principals and teachers with interest and expertise to lead improvement efforts” (p. 71).

These recommendations have been determined based on the data analysis, findings, and results from the study expressed during the individual interviews, focus group discussion, and individual observations of the participants. The results of the study were shared with the participants and principal of the site school. The purpose of sharing the information was to bring awareness to the principal the successful experiences and results the participants had with this alternative pedagogical method. In addition, it initiated a discussion about the potential benefits the school could gain from by implementing this teaching practice school-wide. Harris and Jones (2010) explained, “There is evidence of teachers having a greater commitment to make significant and lasting changes in their classroom and beyond that can contribute to systemic change” (p. 175).

The results of this study were disseminated to the following:

- The results and findings of the study were shared with each participant.
- The complete study, with the results, findings, and recommendations for action, was distributed to each participant and the principal at the site school.
- Upon request, the findings of the study are to be shared at a faculty professional development workshop.

Recommendations for Further Study

Since the early 1900s, advocates supporting the effect of music on learning have suggested that involvement with and exposure to music can serve as a catalyst for improving children's academic achievement (Project Zero, 1967). This research study further supports the many research studies that have been conducted in the past. There were limitations in this study that would lend it to further study. A study with an increased number of participants and additional sites may have produced a broader variation in the responses and results. There were only four participants in this study and the study was confined to one site location.

School budgets continue to be limited when it comes to allowing for more of the arts to be included in school curriculums. Now, at the end of the NCLB (2001), teachers still remain challenged with students falling below the 100% proficiency in literacy that was required of them. Are music-infused language arts lessons the necessary component that should be included within a curriculum structure to remedy this on-going problem? Can the implementation of music-infused lessons impact academic achievement with those students lacking literacy proficiency?

Personal Reflections

Reflecting back on this entire educational journey, I cannot believe that the finish line is here. When I began in 2006, it was under the impression that once I conquered the core courses the rest of the journey would be much easier. Of course, I found that it was very wrong. The biggest mountain was yet to be climbed! The process of getting my proposal approved to be able to begin the study was the beginning of the huge climb. The next step was to begin the actual case study. I assumed that the data collection process would go a lot smoother than it did. The beginning of the selection process happened quite quickly, although, I had anticipated having more participants. However, I am grateful to have retained the four. There was one other who had volunteered, but unfortunately, they did not return the signed consent form within the deadline given.

Upon receiving the four signed consent forms, I met with an unanticipated obstacle which was extreme winter weather. I had to reschedule my interviews, focus group, and observations for each person at least three times each due to extreme weather conditions this winter. I initially thought that it would only take four weeks to collect the study's data. With the schedule changes, the process took double that time. Though it took much longer than expected, the information I gleaned from it was well worth the wait.

The participants were quite intriguing and I learned so much about their teaching practices and their philosophies about the importance of using music in a lesson structure. I have worked with the participants for over 10 years and I was in awe of the information learned about their teaching practices. Each participant's perceptions regarding infusing

music into language arts lessons were slightly different, yet the same. The bottom line for them was that infusing music in language arts lessons is the key to solving the never-ending challenge of getting their students to meet the state standard level for literacy. These teachers experienced so much success and neither of them used the same approach. As the researcher, I entered this study with a personal bias, having been a strong advocate of infusing music in language arts lessons.

During my first 12 years as a classroom teacher, music infused lessons was a common, everyday practice. I believed it made a significant difference in the performance of my students. As a child, I remembered how music infused lessons were a constant throughout my personal education and the impact it made on my learning. From elementary school through high school, music infused lessons were a main staple in many of the lessons my teachers taught. I always knew how significant music was throughout my education which is why I implemented the same practice once I became a teacher. What I did not know, before the research, was about the extensive research studies that had been conducted supporting the importance of this practice. I was amazed by the amount of data that supported this teaching practice.

Although I had read through countless studies about infusing music in language arts instruction, much of the research began to take on a circular motion. Many other researchers were often restating much of that which has already been stated by earlier researchers. The reiteration of the benefits of music infusion is the main reason why I thought it is important to continue further study to hopefully push forth the changes necessary. This revelation is why it will be important to share with the participants and

the principal of the school. It is my desire that the site school will want to introduce this teaching method to the extended teaching staff with the hope that there will be other teachers who will also experience the same successes as the participants.

Conclusion

America's children ranked significantly lower in language arts skills than other children across the world (National Education Association, 2009). There have been numerous curricula designed and used, but still there has been little growth made (Gullett, 2008; Strickland and Morrow, 1989). Yet, as early as 1900, there are documented studies regarding the impact music infused language arts lessons has on student performance levels (Project Zero, 1967). The question now becomes when will the powers that be realize that perhaps music infused lessons is the missing component? As asserted by Kelstrom (1998), "Music deserves a place with the core subjects of math, science, history, and language arts. If it is given the opportunity, music can make a difference in the academic achievement of our schools" (p. 34-43). Furthermore, as confirmed by former U.S. Secretary Paige, the arts are deemed a core academic subject under the NCLB. "Arts integration enables students to have direct experiences, be involved in making decisions about their learning and be engaged in lessons that are motivating" (Mason et al., 2005, p. 3). To continue to research the role music can play in academic achievement is important because this could spark a social change in education with a shift in the structural format of language arts curriculum that has been long overdue.

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Appendix A: Participants' Interview Guide

Introduction: Thank you for accepting to be a participant in my doctoral research study on the topic of: Teachers' Perspectives about Infusing Music into Language Arts

Instruction. All of your responses will be kept anonymous and used solely for the purpose of this study. The interview will not extend more than 60 minutes. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable the interview will be halted. Additionally, feel free to ask for clarification about any question if needed. This interview will be recorded for later transcription. All transcribed information will be shared with you to ensure accuracy.

Introductory & Background Questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many years have you taught at your current school?
3. What grade do you currently teach?
4. Have you taught other grades at this school? If yes, please state the grades.
5. Describe the demographics of your current classroom? Please include class size, gender ratio, cultural makeup, performance levels.
6. Do your students currently receive any formal music instruction at this school during the school day/year? If yes, please describe the amount and frequency.
7. Have you had any musical training? If yes, please elaborate. Tell me if it is vocal or instrumental. If it is instrumental, what instrument?
8. Describe the type of music you most enjoy listening to?

9. If you play recorded music in your classroom, please tell me about the type of musical selections you choose and how are the choices made?

Primary Questions:

1. Describe your current classroom environment?
2. How have you incorporated music in your daily teaching routines?
3. How have you infused music into your reading/writing language arts instruction?
4. Describe the reactions of the students while they listened to the music during language arts instruction.
5. When you played music as a part of your reading/writing language arts instruction, what did you notice about your students' motivation and attitude during those lessons? Please be specific.
6. What did you observe with your students' motivation and attitude when music was not used during the reading and writing language arts instruction? Be as specific as possible.
7. Explain your perspective on why you would use music-infused lessons in reading and writing language arts instruction as opposed to a traditional instructional format.
8. In accordance with the new Common Core Curriculum Standards (2010), do you think music-infused reading and writing lessons aligns with the academic rigor prescribed in those standards? Explain your answer.

Closing Question:

1. Is there anything about using music-infused lessons during language arts that you feel important to expand further on?

Closing: Thank you for participating in this interview and sharing your perspectives on infusing music into language arts instruction. Once this interview has been transcribed, it will be made available to share with you.

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

Introduction: You have all accepted to be participants in my study on the topic of: Teachers' Perspectives about Infusing Music into Language Arts Instruction. All of your responses will be kept anonymous and used solely for the purpose of this study. The questions are to be answered by each of you and discussed as a group. This group discussion will not extend more than 60 minutes. If at any point during the group discussion you feel uncomfortable the discussion will be halted. Additionally, feel free to ask for clarification about any questions if needed. This focus group discussion will be recorded for later transcription. All transcribed information will be shared with you to ensure accuracy.

Question 1. Please state the grade that you are currently teaching, your years of experience as a teacher, and describe the demographics of the students and the learning environment.

Question 2. What is your definition of music-infusion as a method?

Question 3. What types of support do you believe would enable you to effectively incorporate music-infusion as a technique in your lessons on an ongoing basis?

Question 4. What has been the most rewarding experience from using this approach in your language arts lessons? Explain.

Question 5. In what ways has your teaching practices improved through the use of music-infusion in your language arts instruction?

Question 6. Some teachers have incorporated hip-hop rhythms as a way to encourage students to demonstrate their understanding of a subject by creating lyrics explaining various topics. Would you consider such a technique? Why? Why not?

Question 7. Are there particular types of music that you think are particularly effective with your students? Why?

Question 8. If you have not used music-infusion in your language arts instruction, is there anything that has inhibited you?

Question 9. If using music-infusion to teach language arts became mandatory for teachers to use, what would your feelings be? Would you be for it or against it? Please explain your answer.

Closing: Thank you for participating in this focus group discussion and sharing your perspectives on infusing music into language arts instruction. This focus group discussion will be transcribed and shared with you for your review.

Appendix C: Observation Protocol

Teacher's Code _____ School _____

Date of Observation _____ Grade/Level _____

Start Time _____ End Time _____

1. Description of the classroom: (Include the number of students in attendance)

2. Teaching materials being used:

3. Assessment strategies/task implemented:

4. Classroom management strategies used:

5. Lesson being taught:

6. Description of teacher's infusion of music during the lesson instruction:

7. Description of teacher's interactions during the lesson instruction:

8. Explain any non-instructional occurrences: (Ex. class announcements or fire drills, etc.)

-
-
9. Describe the results garnered from the task given to the students during the lesson instruction:

Reflections at Conclusion of Observation:

1. Summarize an overview of what was observed during the lesson. What happened during the classroom observation? Explain the way the teacher infused music into the reading and writing language arts instruction.

2. Summarize things that did not happen. This would include: lesson flow and interactions.

3. Overall description of the classroom culture: academic rigor, interactions and collegial working relationships.

The observations made will be properly coded to protect the integrity of the observation and in accordance with the Walden University IRB regulations. All observation notes will be transcribed and available for the participant's review.

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation from School

Public School XXXXX
XXXXX
XXXXX
Principal

Dear Ms. Thomas,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Teachers' Perspectives About Infusing Music Into Language Arts Instruction* within Public School XXXXX. As part of this study, I authorize you to conduct observations, interviews, and a focus group discussion with selected teachers in the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th grades. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: allowing you access to observe the individual participants in their classrooms during the active school day and the ability to conduct observations, interviews and a focus group discussion with them at the school site. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXXX
Principal
(XXX) XXX XXXX

Curriculum Vitae

Demetria L. Thomas

Professional Experience:

1999 to Present

New York City Department of Education

P.S. 4M – The Duke Ellington School

Certified and Appointed Teacher (Elementary level – Middle Childhood)

License: Common Branches (Prekindergarten through 6th Grade)

Tenured: September 2003

Duties:

2011- Present: Social Studies Projects Coordinator. My teaching responsibility is to teach my students projects based research writing skills. This research is based on the current Social Studies curriculum. The research skills taught includes: how to do a proper computer search, research development and formatting from the thesis statement to the bibliography page, and publishing.

Key Accomplishments and Responsibilities:

- Successful implementation of the current curriculum of language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science, using creativity and interdisciplinary methods as prescribed by the Common Core Standards for Learning. Knowledgeable and skilled in the techniques and strategies related to the New York State standardized examinations.

- Staff Development Committee (2014), School Leadership Team (2000-2009; Chairman 2002-2009), P.S. 4M Social Committee Chairman (2000-2009).
- Served as a member of the C-30 Process Selection Committee responsible for the hire of school administrators (2003 & 2006).
- P.S. 4M United Federation of Teachers Delegate (2000-2003).
- Curriculum Writing Team (2004-2006).
- Summer School Teacher (1999 & 2011 to present).
- School Trip Coordinator (2004 to present)
- Co-facilitator for the 2011-2012 P.S. 4M Debate Team
- Scorer for the NYS English Language Arts and Mathematics exams (2012-2014)
- Testing Administrator for the NYC Gifted & Talented Program (2013 & 2014)

Education

Walden University

Minneapolis, MN

Doctorate in Education with a specialization in Teacher Leadership

Date of graduation: December 2014

Dissertation: Teachers' Perspectives about Infusing Music into Language Arts Instruction

Mercy College

Bronx, NY

Masters of Science in Elementary Education

Received "With Distinction" honors

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

Greensboro, NC

Bachelor of Science in Biology

Affiliations:

Abyssinian Baptist Church (Life Member)

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (Silver Star and Life Member)

Boricua College Education Advisory Board (2006-Present)

Board of Directors, Adolescent Families and Comprehensive Services (1996-2006)

Board of Directors, Edwin Gould Services for Children, Inc. (1991-2000)

United Way of New York, Inc. Linkages Executive Training Program (1991)

References furnished upon request