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Title: Attitudes of Upper Elementary Students Toward Music and Music Education

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The purpose of this study was to determine student attitudes regarding music and music education as a function of grade level, gender, and activities in the general music classroom. The main questions the researcher sought to answer, in regard to her current teaching situation, were: (1) what are student attitudes toward music in general and music in the classroom; (2) whether or not social pressures and/or self-efficacy limits students' participation; (3) if past research indicating participation and interest decreases as students age increases, and girls showing greater interest than boys held true to this particular campus; (4) how to boost motivation and participation in the music classroom and what activities in particular excite and engage students. The population surveyed in this study included 84 fourth and fifth grade music students who have music once a week for fifty minutes. The kindergarten through fifth grade music curriculum is largely based on the methods of Zoltán Kodály, while also drawing influence from other elementary music pedagogies, including Orff-Schulwerk and Dalcroze Eurhythmics, at the discretion of the music specialist. The campus is a Title I school in a suburb of Dallas, Texas.

The method included a 50 Question Survey modeled after Shaw and Tomcala's (1976) Music Attitude Scale for Use with Upper Elementary School Children and adapted to suit the needs and to answer the questions of the researcher. A Likert type scale was used to rate positivity for statements found on the survey. Students were given a sample question to understand how to rate each of the statements found on the survey. The data was analyzed through sums, averages, and standard deviations from the fifty-item questionnaire.

Overall, the findings from this particular questionnaire were aligned with those of previous findings. Girls overall showed a greater level of positivity toward music and music education (scores between 140-160 out of 200) than boys (scores between 120-140 out of 200), and fourth grade students showed a greater rate (over 140) than fifth (below 140). For both fourth and fifth grade students, the statement with the highest rating of positivity was, "I like to listen to music on the radio." In addition, for both grade levels, the lowest rated statement was, "I like completing music worksheets." In regards to self-efficacy and the importance of music, statements to gauge students' perceptions of these two elements were included on the questionnaire. Notably, students were asked to rank the statement, "music is important," to which fourth grade students averaged a 3.2 positivity rating (out of 4) and fifth grade students averages a 3.1. Results were similar in response to the statement, "I am good at music." Although, it should be noted female students largely held the higher positivity ratings to both of these statements, and the male students averaged below a 3.0.

In addition to the fifty question survey, students were asked to rank specific activities used by the researcher during their music class over the course of the year from their favorite to their least favorite. Both grade levels ranked all eleven activities similarly. The top three identically ranked activities included: playing a game, playing instruments, listening to music, and dancing to music. The bottom two included: singing with hand signs and solfege syllables and reading music on the staff.

Among the findings observed by the researcher from this study are: (1) students in general find music and music education to be important, however, this particular study confirmed previous findings to be true at this campus regarding gender and age; (2) students were especially enthusiastic about activities which included some sort of kinesthetic stimulation, i.e. instruments or movement; (3) popular music dominates students musical interest, and students are enthusiastic about music on their own terms and as it relates to their world in and outside of school.

Additionally, the researcher made the following inferences and conclusions regarding teaching style as it applies to this particular campus: (1) due to the transient nature of the campus, students become frustrated and/or uninterested in music when asked to participate in elements of a spiral curriculum they may have been absent for reasons out of their control; (2) students are likely willing to sing, but not in the same style as in younger grades. Literature must reflect student ages and interests; (3) instrument and movement activities must be more readily utilized in the music classroom for active music making and higher level cognitive operations; (4) students are interested in listening to music critically, when given the proper scaffolding and learning targets; (5) social pressures may very well be an important factor to consider when planning assignments and group activities. Most importantly, students like music and find it important, and it is the researcher/educator's responsibility to foster and nurture the creative nature and musical capacity for all students. As music educators, we must appropriately differentiate and modify our classrooms to appeal to students' experiences, interests, and environments both inside and outside of school in order to create a positive self-concept in music.

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