

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Arts Options in Grade Seven

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how and why students in grade six, in a suburban school division in Manitoba, make decisions regarding optional arts course choices for their grade seven year and their perceptions on these courses for grade seven. There was a particular focus on choice related to music courses. The researcher conducted interviews with students in grade seven who chose music as an option, students in grade seven who did not choose music as an option, and conducted focus group conversations with elementary music educators and middle years' music educators. The data indicated that the choice was difficult, that students felt that they should not have to choose and that, with parental support, students chose the option that expressed their passion.

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I also thank the twelve students and ten teachers who so generously shared
their time and their knowledge with me
during this past most glorious of summers in Manitoba.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my younger sister

Patricia Jean Cottom

who loved singing enough to leave her grade 12 basketball team
(that was destined for provincial championship playdowns that year)

because her coach would not allow her to miss a basketball practice
in order for her to attend her church's senior choir practices

and who would have beat me to a Masters Degree had cancer not taken her from us

and to the memory of my Dad

Hugh Milton Stephenson

who was a physical training instructor in World War II and

who loved to sing, and hear his daughters sing and

who valued education and

who really hoped I would become a lawyer, but

who would have been proud of this accomplishment just the same.

It is also dedicated to my Mom, Jean, who started it all,

and my sister Ruth, if it weren't for whom I would still be teaching only

Physical Education, not music as well, and

whose Master's Thesis got waylaid by a church hymnal,

and to my cherished husband Dave

and children Kate, Erik and Josh

for whom Sunday Dinners will now resume!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Rationale for the Study

In her mid-fifties, Betty began to experience unexplained episodes of slurred speech, numbness in her extremities and dizziness, leading to falls. After twenty years of misdiagnoses; from Parkinson's disease, to transient ischemic strokes, to Muscular Dystrophy, Betty recently attended her best friend's seventy-seventh birthday party, her malady still undiagnosed, confined to wheelchair and reduced to blinking her eyes and opening her mouth, bird-like, for the morsels of food her husband lovingly placed there. Conversation swirled, laughter prevailed and inevitably "Happy Birthday" was sung. Surprising all who gathered there, Betty joined in the singing in tribute to her friend.

My grandmother experienced a stroke while undergoing surgery for a broken hip at the age of ninety-two. A vibrant woman until her fall in September, she woke from surgery with no mobility or speech. When the family gathered around the piano four months later for the traditional family Christmas sing-a-long, Grandma joined in with every word on every alto line.

Music is at the very core of who we are. When our bodies would defeat us, when we no longer see, feel or taste, when we can no longer dance, or paint, music remains in the deep, dark recesses of our memories, waiting to give joy, waiting for expression, making sense of who we are and our place in community.

Much personal experience and years of teaching music at the pre-school and elementary school levels have convinced me of the value of music and music education, not just of the value of engaging in music for music's sake, musicing, but of the many other benefits to the individual. Recent research reveals that the benefits of participating

in music activities may be as far reaching as improved self-esteem (Horne, 2007; Jenlink, 1993; Nelson, 1997), increased movement and exercise, even when Parkinson's Disease has taken its toll, (Terauds, 2007), finding our memory and voice while struggling with Alzheimer's Disease (Terauds, 2007) to increased academic scores (Greenslit, 2003, Petrescu, 2007). Surely, the more we engage in music making, the more resources we have upon which to draw for day to day joy, and for supportive therapy when we need it.

Knowing a little about my background, my love of working with children in the music area, and that I am cognizant that there may be many benefits to music making beyond the joy intrinsic to musicing, the reader can imagine my dismay, when not one of my three musically gifted children chose to pursue music as a curricular option during their high school careers. Their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles demonstrate ongoing involvement in music and music education. Music constitutes some of our family rituals. The children themselves could articulate the benefits of music and music education and all demonstrated musical talent early on. Why on earth were my very own children giving up this chance to make music during their school careers when the opportunity was handed to them on a silver platter? This situation made me ponder reasons for participation in middle years and senior years school music programmes.

My children had talent, knowledge gained in private music lessons, prior experience in the form of an elementary school music programme, and support and encouragement from family members. If one were to guess the basis upon which a student might choose music as an option in school, these would seem to be firm grounds for making that choice. Yet, these students, with all of their musical background and backing, chose not to engage in a school music programme at the high school level.

As these children of mine graduated from public school, I decided to delve into this issue. I was fortunate in that I taught in a school that encompassed Kindergarten through grade nine, and I was therefore able to informally observe which of my grade six students chose to go on in music, and which did not. These informal observations made me no wiser. Some students that I predicted would go on to the band programme, did not. These were students who were fully engaged in every aspect of the elementary music programme, read music easily, produced creative improvisations, and wrote compositions. They sang in volunteer choirs and attended extracurricular Orff and Recorder clubs. Their parents drove them to rehearsals and attended performances and were supportive in many other observable ways. Other students, who struggled with musical literacy and engagement in the elementary music class setting and whose parents did not attend even special performances, were not expected to continue in musical studies, yet some of them did. My predictions did not always come true.

The desire to pursue this research project comes out of my personal and professional experience with students who are faced with optional courses of study, and who do or do not choose music, sometimes as predicted, sometimes not. As Sichivista (2003) noted, “more research is needed in the field of music motivation and persistence to better determine the best ways to recruit and retain students in music programmes” (p. 339). In this study I will contribute to the research that aims to determine what it is that motivates students to continue in music studies through their school careers and, on the other hand, what might discourage them in continuing musical studies and will contribute to this research from the students’ own perspective.

The Issue of Student Choice

The adults involved with children who must make choices regarding course options for their middle or junior high school years do not fully understand how or why students make those choices. In particular, the adults involved with children in grade six in Manitoba schools have not determined how or why children choose to remain in a music stream through junior high school, or how and why they do not.

Music can inform who we are, define who we are, provide us with joy, and help us to express sorrow. Music gives us recreation activity to enjoy in solitude or in community. Music remains within, long after other faculties have left us. Without music instruction, our participation in music may be reduced to passive listening rather than active engagement in playing or singing. Without participation in music and in failing health, we have one less means to express ourselves, fewer recreational alternatives, and one less opportunity for connecting with our community. Participation and instruction in music is important to humans.

For many children, access to private music instruction is not an option. Lack of family inclination, finances and resources of time may preclude boys and girls from studying music privately. For many school age children, the opportunity to study music, make music, master an instrument, or sing in a choir is available only in the public school setting. To gain as full an education in music as possible, students should participate in music courses through their whole school experience. In most Manitoba schools, elementary school students have music education as part and parcel of their school week. While offered as a course of study in the students' middle years, school music programmes become an option during these years of school life.

To continue music studies from elementary school through high school graduation, students in Manitoba must first engage in a music programme at the middle years level. At the conclusion of grade five, grade six or seven, students are presented with options for study in the following year. In the school division in which I am employed, all middle years, or junior high schools offer music as one of the choices (J. Allard, Bi. Burns, Br. Burns, E. Egan, D. Juby, M. Lawrence, & L. Wurtak, personal communication, February 12, 2011). If students are to engage in music making as part of their high school programme, they must choose music as their option for their middle years of schooling. If they do not choose to engage in music study at the middle years level, chances are they will not, because of course pre-requisites, be able to re-enter school music programmes in later years. It is important that students engage in musical activities at the middle years stage of their education.

To create an environment in which the highest possible percentage of students have music as a means of expression through choosing music as their option in the middle years, music educators and school administrators must first be able to answer several questions:

1. Why do some students choose to engage in music study in the middle years?
2. Why do some students choose not to study music in the middle years?
3. What factors contribute to students' decisions regarding elective subjects?

Only when educators and administrators have the answers to these questions, and understand the underlying reasons for the choices made by students when they are faced with curricular options, can those educators and administrators plan for music to be included in the choices made by students.

The Research Questions

Music educators and school administrators do not yet fully understand what factors determine student choice regarding their optional courses as they enter grade seven. Particularly, educators and school administrators do not know why it is that students continue in music education in the school setting, and why it is that some students do not participate in music education programmes past their elementary school experience. Educators do not fully understand their students' perspectives on their options for grade seven.

One problem being addressed through this study is the predicament that administrators and music educators find themselves in when they do not know why students do, or do not, choose music as an option. The focus of this research project is to establish the perspectives of students on their course options as they enter grade seven and the factors, as articulated by students, which determine their choice of optional courses for their middle years education. The questions to be answered are “what are student perspectives on their course options as they enter grade seven,” “what factors encourage students to choose music as an option in their middle years' schooling,” and “what factors discourage students from choosing music as an option during their middle years' schooling?” For purposes of triangulation, also to be determined is “What are music educators' perspectives on choice for students after grade six, particularly as they relate to music options?”

“The most important test of any qualitative study is its usefulness. First there is the usefulness of comprehension. A good qualitative study can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1998, p. 58). Perhaps

when music educators and administrators understand how their students perceive their grade seven course options, why it is that students choose music, and why it is that some do not, those same educators and administrators might be in a better position to understand the situation and address any factors that would encourage a greater percentage of children to continue musical studies at school.

What might these factors be? Based upon my experience, some factors might be: the student's musical background, including parental encouragement and support or lack there-of, the student's experience in elementary school music programmes, the student's experience in private music lessons, scheduling of the middle years music programme, the content or context of the middle years music programme, peer pressures, and the "cool" factor, as factors that might influence a student's choice of music as an option. By speaking directly with students and their music educators, I hope to find which of these factors, or others that I may discover, most influence a student's choice as to whether or not to choose optional studies of music at the middle years.

The Researcher's Positionality

It is critically important that the researcher understand their values and bias before embarking on a research project, and to be aware of these values and biases throughout the process of conducting the research. I embarked on this study to find out how and why students make option choices for their grade seven year. I am a music educator who came to music education from a physical education background. I was not always a music educator. However, in many ways music has always been an important part of my life, from studying cello as a child to singing in church choirs and playing trumpet in a small town band. As a teenager, I knew that students in larger centres were able to participate in

these kinds of activities in their school setting. I remember feeling how fortunate they were. As a music and physical educator who still finds joy in corporate music making after work hours, it is my constant hope that all children will find community, recreation and joy in such activity. I believe that music is important in people's lives and I value music education for the foundation which it can provide for future participation.

Therefore, my bias would be that all children see their way to participate in music education opportunities through their school careers. I want to understand why some students do continue in music after grade six, and why some students do not.

I am an elementary music and physical educator who is employed in the school division where I conducted this study. My school division has supported this research fully. Superintendents (Appendix A) and principals (Appendix B) awarded permission to me to recruit participants for the study, both from their student populations, and from their professional staff. I hold no position in any of the middle years' schools from which the participants in the study came. I am an elementary music and physical educator in two of the elementary schools in the division. My position in the school division, in my elementary schools, does not depend upon the numbers of children who choose to continue in music after grade six. I am only interested in knowing how and why students in grade six make their decisions regarding their optional courses in grade seven.

Overview of the Study

I chose a qualitative approach to this study. I was interested in the perspectives of the students who have to make choices about options in grade seven, how they make their choices and why they choose music and why they do not choose music. I chose an interpretive approach with a constructivist stance.

I have stated my bias regarding music education, in particular my bias regarding students' continuing to study music in the school system through their middle years. I have stated that it is important for educators to understand how and why students make their decisions around options for middle years in order to better address any obstacles to music education that administrators and music educators may not know of. The literature review incorporates information that supports the place of music and music education in student's lives in order to give support for this study outside my own bias.

In addition to information regarding music and music education, the literature review outlines the music programme in the school division of choice for the study, and addresses assessment in music education. Also included are sections on choice, understanding students in the middle years, choice as it relates to adolescents, motivation as it relates to choice, environment, and family as they relate to flow, motivation and choices for adolescents.

The literature review also includes studies on the factors that affect the choices of students regarding school options. The review includes quantitative studies on factors affecting academic choices, the predictors of students' continuing in band programmes, and the non-music predictors of students enrolling in music. The review also includes qualitative studies that looked at student choice regarding participation in a grade nine music programme and retention of students in music programs once they have chosen to participate in them. My analysis of this literature informed this study.

The method section of this study addresses the way in which this study was designed. I describe the problem addressed in the study and the approach that was taken. Because I employed a qualitative approach, theoretical sensitivity and connoisseurship

are defined as they applied to this study. The manner in which the data were collected from interviews and from focus groups is outlined as is the key themes analysis and the triangulation of data sources. These methods formed the basic processes of the study.

Because I bear such an interest in what these people have to say about their choices, there is a section in the method describing my perspective on the study. That completed, a discussion on the methodology, including the procedures, practices and principles used in the study follows. All ontological assumptions, including those regarding the participants, and epistemological assumptions are outlined. Included under data collection and analysis are sections on how the participants were recruited, and how the data from the interviews and focus groups was recorded. I also describe in the method how the data were analyzed.

Definition of Terms

Some terms need clarification in the context of this study. The following terms may have other meanings in other contexts.

Actor: A student who, when choosing options after grade six, chose drama.

Artist: A student who, when choosing options after grade six, chose art.

Band Teacher: An educator who focuses on music education and uses band as the vehicle to deliver music education to students in grades seven and up, in a grade 7-9 setting or to grades six, seven, and eight (and nine) in a school that houses grades 5-8 or 5-9.

Elementary School: In the division in which the study takes place, an elementary school could be a K-4 school, a K-6 school. In this study, this term may also refer to the K-5 or the K-6 portion of a K-8 or a K-9 school.

Elementary Music Specialist: An educator who focuses on music education in a K-4 or a K-6 setting, or on grades five and six in a 5- 8 or a 5-9 setting.

Junior High School: Term used by the participants in the study in reference to a school to which students move between grade six and grade seven

Middle Years School: In the division in which the study takes place, a middle years' school could house grades 5-8, 5-9, 7-8, 7-9 or the middle years students could be housed within a K-8 or a K-9 school. I use the term to describe moving from grade six to grade seven because it is currently the preferred usage in the division in which the study took place.

Musician: A student who, when choosing options after grade six, chose music.

Musicing: The act of making music, either alone, or with others.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Through the work on this research project, I attempted to begin to understand the perspectives of students on their course options for grade seven and how and why students make their choice regarding music as an option in grade seven. To develop an argument for the undertaking of this study, an argument divorced from my own bias (as outlined in the introduction) that school music education in the middle years is important for every child, a review of literature regarding music in our lives, and the role that music education can play in children's lives, and the forms that that music education can take, is included here. I focused on students in early adolescence; therefore, information regarding the stage of development of the students in question, how they find a balance of individual effort, reward and fun, and what motivates them is also included. Through this literature review, I also describe these adolescents' perceptions of their place in family and society, and the influence that peers bring to bear upon children at this age. Included is an introduction to the concept of choice itself. Research into choices that children make in other subject areas and some research into the predictors of engagement in school music courses are included. Also included is a review of research into predictors of student's choosing music programmes, and research into why students remain in or drop out of a music programme once they are in one.

Music in Our Lives

As long as philosophers have attempted to sort through the joys and travails of human existence, they have insisted that music itself, and thus music education, is key to human fulfillment, human knowledge, human satisfaction. As a mode of knowledge, Hart (2001) states that Plato considered music comparable to geometry as an expression of the

underlying order of the cosmos. “Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything” (thinkexist.com, 2011). Confucius is credited with saying “Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without” (thinkexist.com, 2011). And every music educator’s favourite, thanks to Neitzsches, is, “Life without music would be an error” or as my contemporaries like to put it, “Life without music would be a mistake” (thinkexist.com, 2011).

Music is everywhere. If not plugged into an iPod, or other music listening device, people still hear music in shopping malls, cars, or on the weather channel. While being bombarded with music from a variety of genres, music education can help students “get into music in a more active way, and find in the experience of music a more positive response. It is one thing to overhear and quite another to listen to and fully engage with music as though it mattered” (Swanwick, 1979, p.41). Swanwick (2001) says, “Music is not some curious anomaly, split off from the rest of life, not just an emotional thrill by-passing any process of thought, but it is an integral part of our cognitive processes. It is a way of knowing, a way of thinking, a way of feeling” (p. 7). Furthermore, he emphasizes that music education’s role is to strengthen “the relationship between pupils and music” (Swanwick, 1979, p. 42).

Music Education

The role of music education may be to strengthen the relationship between pupils and music. In the following section I explore some of the roles and forms that music education can take.

Music as aesthetic education. While “all art serves the same function, which is

to provide a means for exploring and understanding the nature of human feeling” (Reimer, 1970, p. 143), teaching courses in more than one art makes “each subject clearer by showing its uniqueness as contrasted with other subjects in the same family”, clarifies “the underlying principles which make all the subjects members of the same family” and gives “a broad view of each subject as an individual in a family and of the family as one among many” (Reimer, 1970, p. 144). Particularly,

aesthetic education in music attempts to enhance learnings related to the distinctive capacity of musical sounds (as various cultures construe what these consist of) to create and share meanings only sounds structured to do so can yield. Creating such meanings, and partaking of them, requires an amalgam of mind, body and feeling. Musical meanings incorporate within them a variety of individual/cultural meanings transformed by musical sounds. Gaining its special meanings requires direct experience with music in any of the ways cultures provide, supported by skills, knowledge, understandings and sensitivities education can cultivate (Reimer, 2003, p.11).

Greene (2007) agrees with Reimer, and states, by paraphrasing Dewey, that music as aesthetic education can arouse “our students, as well as our selves, to the great, unsettled questions, to the need to choose” (p. 40). Also quoting Dewey, Hausman (1981) writes that using music as aesthetic education has the power “to remove prejudice, do away with scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wonts and custom, and perfect the power to perceive” (p. 55). In employing music as aesthetic education, Greene says music students are freed to find a venue for expressing “aesthetic sensitivity and for reaching out for their own authentic being” (p.40).

Ball (1971) argues that aesthetic education combines factual knowledge around the elements of music with an appreciation of how those elements are used, thus giving students the “power to make discriminations” (p. 60). “It protects one’s most valuable possession—the quality of his experience” (p. 61). As Swanwick (1979) states, it also ensures that pupils “develop not merely a tolerance of a limited musical idiom but also an ability to approach actively and willingly music from a range of styles and contexts” (p.42). Bowman (1998) explains Kant’s approach to aesthetic judgment in that these judgments “are not mere expressions of subjective preference” (p. 76), and that the ability to make these discriminations, or judgments are “an indispensable part of...human cognitive faculties” (p.77).

Music as aesthetic education provides our students with the opportunity and skills to develop a knowledge base and to use that base of knowledge to make judgments about the world, specifically the musical world, around them. Music as aesthetic education also provides the opportunity for our students to remain open to new ideas. Because they have the capacity to apply knowledge about music to all genres, their ears are opened in new ways to previously remote or foreign sounding music. Having acquired knowledge regarding music, students may listen more critically to the preferred music of the day and determine for themselves to what styles of music they spend their time listening.

Music as cultural education. While I was in the library, a young student approached me for help. She was preparing for a presentation for her classmates on the use of colour by various societies. She had found a passage in a book that described the use of white and red body paints in different cultures to signify that a person had caused the death of another person or an animal. She needed clarification. Was she reading the

passage correctly? She was not sure, because, in her culture, red signifies life, vibrancy, and celebration. Were these other cultures really using red to signify that a death had occurred? This young woman was trying to understand other cultures. We live in a multicultural society. Surely education should lead to understanding between and amongst cultures. Beynon (2000) laments that we

find ourselves in a traditional school system that has been described as one that acts in the best interests of the dominant, middle class and values the cultural capital of that class. Teachers implicitly contribute to the maintenance of these values through their curriculum and teaching methods and by collectively viewing their pupils as a generic, genderless mass in their speech and practice (p. 120).

Woodford (2005) speaks specifically to music education, and wonders if young people feel excluded by the traditional nature of music programmes. “The current lack of public support for orchestras and classical music and for music education in public schools, may, in part be a consequence of past elitist and exclusionary practices” (Woodford, 2005, p. 35).

When music programmes remain static and maintain the status quo, it may be because,

many music education majors and teachers narrowly conceive themselves as performers and performance teachers, as practitioners charged with acquiring and replicating traditional performance and teaching methods, and not intellectuals in the sense of being politically aware and disposed to question and challenge the professional status quo (Woodford, 2005, p.23).

Music education philosophers such as Broudy (1990) and in his early days, Reimer

(1970), would have had music educators focus on the classics for aesthetic education, thus, perhaps, perpetuating a music education that is stuck in time and place. Greene (2007) states that “it is important to make the point that the events that make up aesthetic experiences are events that occur within and by means of the transactions with our environment that situate us in time and space” (p. 36). Reimer (2003) explains his current thinking on education.

The ‘beyond the commonplace’ experience, or the ‘transformation’ of experience that music makes available in its unique way, and that should be an important dimension of teaching and learning, has been achieved in all cultures throughout history. Whatever the culture, music shapes individual and communal experience into unique meanings able to be created and shared by those who participate in that culture (p. 11).

Although he comments on a post-aesthetic sensibility, Woodford (2005) adds to this line of thinking by stating that “to a growing number of music education critics, we live in a post-aesthetic world in which notions of beauty and universality and transcendence of time, culture, place and biology are passé.” (p. 39). While Broudy would have us focus only on the “classics” in order to find what can be described as beautiful, Greene, Reimer and Woodford suggest that educators must provide experiences that enable students to understand their time and reality, thus enabling them to understand the culture in which they live.

Gay (2007) gives credence to Greene’s and Woodford’s ideas by going one step further, and stating that “students perform more successfully at all levels when there is greater congruence between their cultural backgrounds, and such school experiences as

task interest, effort, academic achievement and feeling of personal efficacy or social accountability” (p. 277). Gay posits the idea that “multicultural education is integral to improving the academic success of students of colour and preparing all youths for democratic citizenship in a pluralistic society” (p. 274). Students feel more comfortable and prepared to learn when “students from different ethnic groups areengaged in learning situations that occur in familiar and friendly frameworks than in those occurring in strange and hostile ones” (p. 276). In 2005, Woodford stated that “one way that music teachers can make their performance programmes more inclusive is by continuing to go beyond traditional concert and jazz bands, orchestras and choirs to offer alternative groups and ensembles that might be more attractive to the general population (eg. percussion, folk and world music ensembles, rock and popular music groups of various kinds, glee clubs and community sing-songs). Some progress has already made in this direction, although much more remains to be done in terms of diversifying the curriculum, while teaching children how to perform intelligently and responsibly” (p. 89). The results of such efforts by music educators are two-fold. When involved in a music class in which a variety of cultures, genres and approaches are experienced, students are not only learning about other cultures, but they are made to feel more comfortable because there is a place in school where they can experience their own culture.

When musics of different cultures and styles are considered, Gay (2007) suggests that we can go beyond this idea of simply ensuring that different musics are studied.

Within musical genres, there are categories to which students need to be exposed,

For example, the study of American literature, art, and music should include the contributions of males and females from different ethnic groups in all genres and

in different expressive styles. Thus, the study of jazz would examine various forms and techniques produced not just by African Americans, but also by Asians, Europeans and Latino Americans (p. 276).

Music educators can no longer live in their own little worlds in their own little musical classrooms. There is too much to consider. They can no longer be “profoundly ignorant of the world around them and of the grand political, philosophical artistic and social movements that shape their culture” (Woodford, 2005, p. 74). Teachers and students can work together to select specific issues for attention, formulate possible solutions in relationship to them, experiment with those solutions and other possibilities, and then modify them as necessary. This constitutes an ongoing process of dancing with students, literally, a dance of becoming. (p. 296)

Our country is a beautiful quilt stitched with a multitude of peoples, all of whom can be made to feel more comfortable and successful when they experience some of the ‘familiar’ and become knowledgeable about the ‘familiar’ of others. The music room can offer this to our students. Music education can help students understand their place, time and community if educators choose to engage in multicultural, indeed, ‘multi-genre’ music education.

Music as a means to student engagement. Greene (2007) and Bowman (1998) credit Schopenhauer with explaining that music gives the means for humans to express their passions. Greene (2007) states that, “it has always been said that music is the language of feeling and of passion, as words are the language of reason” (p. 32). Swanwick (1979) concurs when he says “experience of music as an art helps us to explore feelings rather than merely encapsulate them” (p. 112). However, if we are to

offer our students this platform for the expression of their feelings and passion, engaging all students in the curriculum is crucial. As long ago as the early 1970s Hausman (1971) argued that music education needed to take on “differing modes of artistic expression” (p. 47) if all students were to find their voice in the music room. He argued for the use of the student’s own music for study in the classroom as a vehicle towards maintaining interest in the study of music, thereby leading them toward aesthetic knowledge and the privilege of choice. I have already mentioned that Gay (2007) asserts that “students perform more successfully at all levels when there is greater congruence between their cultural backgrounds, and such school experiences as task interest, effort academic achievement and feeling of personal efficacy or social accountability” (p. 277). Albert (2005) agrees that when music educators work toward the inclusion of the musical language of the students, whatever that language may be, students become more engaged in the educational experience.

Ball (1971) urges caution when educators employ music from a variety of genres and cultures. Different genres should not simply and only be used to ‘hook’ the students, but when they are, he concurs that a quality music education can result from the use of the same.

We should not be teaching rock, nor should we be teaching Bach; we should be teaching a sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of music. If this is our clear goal, there is little doubt that both Bach and rock will be used in the classroom, as well as much of what lies between the two. But it will not be done for the sake of pushing one music over another. We will be trying to teach principles and leave the judgments to the students enlightened by such instruction (p. 62).

If it is the case, that students are more fully engaged when the setting they are in and the content in which they are immersed speaks to them, why is it the case that

rock and alternative music groups, despite their obvious attraction to at-risk students, are seldom countenanced in schools or acknowledged for their potential for promoting music development or other growth! In my own experience, when those groups are tolerated in schools, they are usually student-initiated and lacking in adult supervision and instruction (Woodford, 2005, p.82).

But, “students perform more successfully at all levels when there is greater congruence between their cultural backgrounds and such school experiences as task interest, effort, academic achievement and feeling of personal efficacy or social accountability” (Gay, 2007, p. 277). Is that not what all educators desire as the end result? Do we not want to develop students who are self-actualized and who have the capacity to judge, embrace or discard all of life’s opportunities based on their ability to discriminate founded upon a solid foundation of information and the ability to apply that information to their appreciation and decision making?

A respondent to *The Arts in Education Summary Report on Music Education* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2004, p.4) stated, “Many times I have seen ‘problem’ students’ behaviour undergo radical change due to success in the arts. That transfers over into other academic areas.” Music educators have the tools for increasing student engagement in their hands.

Music education and creativity. Sternberg and Lubart (2007) contend that the school system is not a place that fosters creativity. “Taking a course in a new area, or in an area of weakness is likely to lead to a low grade, which in turn may dim a student’s

future prospects. Risking an unusual response on an exam or an idiosyncratic approach in a paper is a step likely to be taken only with great trepidation because of the fear that a low or failing grade on a specific assignment may ruin one's chances for a good grade in the course" (p.174). The school system tends to stifle the quest for creativity. But Sternberg and Lubart (2007) along with Pink (2005) insist that creativity is crucial to our student's future. As jobs based in engineering, technology and finance are increasingly located off-shore, our workforce will depend upon the "ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into a novel invention" (Pink, 2005, p.52).

Sternberg (2010) contends that creativity can be taught, and, with Williams (Sternberg and Williams, 2010), outlines that it consists of synthetic, analytic and practical abilities. In the music room, Goodkin (2006) outlines ways in which students exercise synthetic ability when they find a new sound on an instrument, or connect two sounds others had not thought of, or when they apply a series of sounds to tell a story or accompany a dance. Goodkin also contends that students develop analytic ability, when they decide the two sounds do not work together, but that the series of sounds expresses just what they hoped. They express and develop practical ability when they can expand upon their ideas, record them in some way, rehearse them some way, and either perform them, or teach their new music making to another person or group of people. According to Goodkin, children who study music in an Orff classroom do this all the time. This process is the essence of jazz. It is also the work that goes into any musical composition. Giving the opportunity to create, enhancing and teaching creativity is part and parcel of music education.

Music Advocacy

The literature reviewed thus far supports the idea that there is a place for music education for our students. Our province attempts to ensure quality music education for its students. In its most recent statement on the arts, Manitoba Education notes that

The arts, taught with the essential goals in mind, contribute unique learning experiences that benefit students as individuals and as members of society. The imaginative, exploratory, active learning inherent in the arts enhances cognition, engages attention, motivates learners, and connects them to content emotionally, physically, and personally. Learning in and through the arts produces excitement, joy, and surprise (MECY, 2003, p. iii)

Hoffman Davis (2008) succinctly states, “from imagination to social responsibility, the arts teach our children about what it is to be human and enable them to experience their humanity in thought and in action” (p.78). The arts statement (2003) goes on to say that

The individual arts, (music, dance, drama, and the visual arts) are characterized by unique forms, each employing a variety of media. Students require substantive instruction and active participation in the arts to gain knowledge, skills, and understanding in one or more of the arts.

In Manitoba, as of 2010, music education, as one of the arts requiring substantive instruction, is receiving tangible support. Of 44 school divisions surveyed, 79% percent of the respondents indicated that music is as important as other subjects (Morin, 2010, p. 87), 65% percent of school divisions have regularly scheduled meetings for its music specialists, and one quarter of the school divisions have at least a part-time music curriculum coordinator or consultant. Of the arts disciplines, music classes are allotted

the greatest percentage of time and are more likely to be taught by qualified specialists. Music education seems well served in Manitoba.

The Coalition for Music Education in Canada had as its slogan, for a time, “Making Music Makes you Smarter”. While this claim is disputed, the literature reviewed unearthed recent evidence that engagement in music activities positively correlates with improved test scores in mathematics (Helmrich, 2008) and language (Greenslit, 2003; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009). Recent dissertations provide further evidence that participation in music education can improve students’ self-efficacy and self esteem (Nelson, 1997) and therefore feel more confidence in other subject areas. Hartwig (2003) credits Fiske with finding that “students who are involved in the arts attain higher levels of achievement and that such involvement can actually help ‘level the playing field’ for youngsters from disadvantaged circumstances” (p.20). While this evidence alone may not be conclusive enough to constitute support for students continuing in a music programme because the study of music can support their learning in other areas, all of the information gathered thus far underscores the importance of including music in the curriculum that students follow.

According to the literature reviewed thus far, music education can offer much opportunity to the developing student. As aesthetic education, music gives the participant the ability to listen to the music around them with a critical ear, and lays the groundwork for the capacity to analyze and describe other artistic experiences. Music education presents the opportunity to be exposed to unfamiliar cultures, and the opportunity to feel at home in a new situation through studying music of a familiar culture. Music education engages students in the school situation in ways that other subjects do not, and engages

the student in creative activity that has structure and purpose. This is what is possible.

Assessment in the Elementary Music Classroom

I couldn't understand why an otherwise intelligent and athletic boy in a grade two class at my new school would not sing and struggled at the instruments. A year and a half into my tenure at the school, I was told by the child's parent that the former music educator had told the boy that he had a "terrible voice and would never sing". Smithrim (2000) has a similar recollection (p. 215) of her own classmates being divided into bluebirds, sparrows, blue jays and frogs, based upon their singing ability.

Assessing achievement in any endeavour is an important part of learning. While learning in any subject area in school must be communicated to both the student, the teachers and the parent, the manner in which assessment is approached and reported in the arts must be planned and executed very carefully. Smithrim (2000) states, "Children's artistic selves can sustain life long damage through the practice of grading in the arts at the primary level" (p. 220). The notion of a 'grade' gives a student a perception of his or her capability in that subject area, no matter how well the teacher tries to explain to the child, 'well, your grade this term is based upon your sight reading, but don't forget how well you played in the concert!' Care regarding approach and language around assessment and reporting is imperative.

Grading using numbers, letters, or words (E for excellent, S for satisfactory) is not generally appropriate at the primary level in the arts. Young children do not have the capacity to understand that a low grade in any of the arts means that the child did not meet grade level expectations. The child only hears that he or she cannot sing, dance, do art, or drama" (Smithrim, 2007, p. 221).

When teachers of the arts are required to report using numerical or alphabetical indicators, those music educators may choose to use such language as “colour theory: A, *not* art: A, music notation: B, *not* Music: B “ (Smithrim, 2007, p. 220). Attention and care should be given to assessment and reporting in music.

Choice

The literature reviewed reinforces the idea that music education can be education for aesthetic valuing and for valuing and understanding a variety of cultures. It can be a platform for encouraging and teaching creativity and for increasing student engagement. Although still contentious as a theory, there are still those who contend that music education can indeed enhance learning in other areas. I have outlined what other people think that music can do for people, and a portrait of elementary music education in the school division in which the study occurred. This study focused on how and why students in grade six make the choices that they make regarding their options as they enter their junior high years and their perceptions regarding those choices. Choice is discussed here.

“Novelist and existentialist philosopher Albert Camus posed the question, ‘Should I kill myself, or have a cup of coffee?’ His point was that every thing in life is a choice” (Schwartz, 2005, p.42). “We are all, as individuals, both the masters and victims of choice” (Foskett & Hemlsley-Brown, 2001, p. 21). Choice is an opportunity that humans take advantage of or simply fall into, from the moment they are born. Some choices are inconsequential, others are life affirming, and can be life changing. ”Choosing well is difficult” (Schwartz, 2005, p. 47), but either consciously or unconsciously, Schwartz says people go through seven steps in making a decision. These include; figuring out a goal, evaluating the importance of the goal, array the options, evaluate the options, pick the

options and later use the decision to modify new goals.

Most of the students in grade six in the school division in this study are presented with course options for their grade seven year. One of those options is music. The students must choose between art and music, or from art, drama and music. Perhaps this practice in having to choose is a good thing. “Every choice we make is a testament to our autonomy, to our self-determination” (Schwartz, 2005, p. 101). Also, the practice will help students with making choices further along in their academic career. If they are gifted enough to attend a post secondary institution such as Princeton University, in their first year, Schwartz says, students have “350 courses from which to satisfy its general education requirements” (p. 16). He also says that these students “are required to make choices about education that may affect them for the rest of their lives. And they are forced to make these choices at a point in their intellectual development when they may lack the resources to make them intelligently” (p.17). Children and young adults may not, at their stage of life, be fully cognizant that these choices they are making may affect their goals, and their life path’s trajectory. The children in grade six in the school division in the study, do not have 350 options to choose from. They choose between art and band, or from art, drama and band. The choice that they make can affect the rest of their school career in that, if they do not choose music, they may not be able to return to the school music stream after grade seven (Eight principals, personal communication, February 12, 2011).

Schwartz (2005) outlined seven steps for making decisions about choices, and stated, “even with a limited number of options, going through this process can be hard work” (p 21). “Most good decisions will involve these steps:

1. Figure out your goal or goals
2. Evaluate the importance of each goal
3. Array the options
4. Evaluate how likely each of the options is to meet your goals
5. Pick the winning option
6. Later use the consequences of your choice to modify your goals, the

importance you assign them, and the way you evaluate future possibilities (p. 47). He found that past experience often overruled the decision making process, and that people evaluated those experiences “on the basis of how good they feel at their best, and how good they feel at the end” (p. 50) For instance, if a grade six student is mildly amused by her music class in grade six, and at the end of the year, the class produces a great farewell production, she may be swayed by that final great experience to choose to take music. However, a student who has as great year long experience in music class, and then at the end of the year, for some reason the farewell production is less than stellar, that final experience may preclude music as a choice for grade seven. Even if the child has gone through some steps for making a decision, that work may be negated by a recent experience.

While our past experience affects our choices in specific ways, the framing of the choices ahead of us also influences the choices we make, no matter how diligently we adhere to prescribed steps for decision-making. As cited by Schwartz (2005), Kahneman and Tversky say that the way the choice is presented frames the choice in a certain way. In the case of grade six children, options can be framed in various ways. Music in grade seven might be framed as a subject for which there is a lot of outside of school work

leading to tests and assessments of playing ability, or it might be framed as a course where the participants work toward performance objectives so that the entire band can go to festivals and on an outside of province tour. It could be the same music course, with the same music educator, but the way the course is framed can affect the choice that students make.

With choices, no matter how we make them, comes the possibility of regret. Schwartz (2005) names two types of regret: anticipated regret and post decision regret. In the case of grade six students, anticipated regret are such concerns as, what if my friends don't choose my option, what if I don't like the teacher? Post decision regret are thoughts such as, I chose my option with my friends, and I wish I had chosen the other, or my parents insisted that I enroll in this option and it is not right for me. Regret can be, for any person making a choice, part of the process.

No matter how many choices, no matter where those choices may or may not lead, no matter what work is done on decision making, choices can be based on past experience, or on the way a choice is framed, and acting on a choice may come with some regret. As adolescents make choices there may be other factors at work. Some of these follow.

Understanding Students in the Middle Years

Factors affecting choice for all of us include past experience and the framing of the choice at hand. This study concerns how and why young adolescents make curricular choices, therefore a description of who these young people are, their stage of development, and how these might bear on choices is included here.

Blume and Zembar (2007) describe children in grade six as being in middle

childhood and as being individuals “worthy of our attention” (p. 34). These children are in a “period of preparation for adolescence along a path with many choices or ‘forks in the road’” (p. 39). This statement is directly applicable to this study. Children are worthy of attention. Mees (2002) agrees, saying that “since it is during the middle school years that young adolescents begin to make lifelong decisions concerning their futures, it is important for teachers to study them and their cultures closely” (p. 5) The choices to be made during the spring of their grade six year regarding their course work for the next year are forks in the road for these young people. Blume and Zembar (2007) refer to MacArthur and agree with his suggestion that researchers should do more to try to discover “what influences and experiences contribute to different outcomes for children during their first school years?” and “how can the likelihood of successful outcomes be increased?” (p. 39). But first, who are they?

Children, around the age of twelve, in middle childhood, are described as “betweenagers” (p. 35), by Blume and Zembar (2007). Mees (2002) states that these young adolescents are “very much in a transitional state, not quite a child, yet not quite a teenager” (p. 15).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is described as including, on its ladder: physiological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization, (Blume & Zembar, 2007). Mees (2002) contends that betweenagers are moving through having their physiological needs met and between safety and security. Their bodies are rapidly changing, and Mees found through extensive interviews with young adolescents that school policies, such as washroom policies, time for eating, and physical education policies contribute to these children remaining in a stage where they

are in need of feeling physiologically safe and secure. The physical layouts, or plans of schools often do not accommodate for their physiological needs, nor their need for safety. Change rooms with no privacy or functioning showers, and washrooms with no privacy do not contribute to moving toward feeling loved and that one belongs, let alone having secure self-esteem. Students try to make choices that enhance their security and self-esteem.

While students in grades five and six remain within the foundation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Mees (2002) also stated that, "It is apparent through the responses of the students in this study that most fifth and sixth graders are at the concrete operational level" with respect to Piaget's cognitive levels (p. 14). These youngsters can think logically about concrete events, understand cause and effect, and can make informed decisions based upon prior knowledge.

While they are striving toward meeting their physiological and safety and security needs, children in grades five and six are developing "greater self-regulation". Education Canada (2011) defines self-regulation as "the ability to stay calmly focused and alert, which often involves-but cannot be reduced to-self-control". Self-control implies the capacity to conform to the requirements of the world around children, expectations of parents and parameters of school life. Self-regulation is more than that. As children approach their teen years, they are beginning to understand and manage their biological, cognitive, social, emotional, and reflective states. According to Blume and Zembar (2007) betweenagers' ability to self-regulate relates to the fact that they know they are growing physically in spurts, know they are undergoing great changes in appearance. They understand that they are changing physically very rapidly and can accommodate for

that.

Betweenagers are also experiencing the development of reasoning abilities and they are acquiring learning strategies. Blume and Zembar (2007) say that at this stage, boys and girls “acquire personal competencies through participation in academic, athletic or artistic activities” (p. 44), and they understand where their competencies lie. Self-regulation includes these children’s ability to reflect on their talents, and to build upon them.

Self-regulation also includes the developing ability to make the effort to understand others; and to recognize and demand fairness at home, at school and in other social situations. At this stage, ‘betweenagers’ are acquiring deeper “emotional attachments to family members and others, and a deepening sense of who they are and what they can achieve through serious effort and commitment” (p. 44). Mees (2002) says “their emotions are on the surface as they try to make sense of the world in which they live (p. 15). The ability to self-regulate contributes to their ability to develop and sustain relationships with others.

Part and parcel of the emotional attachments that are developing in betweenagers is “deepening same-sex friendships” (Blume & Zembar, 2007, p. 44). Mitchell (2001) cites Francis Bacon in saying, “The worst solitude is to be destitute of sincere friendship” (p. 119), and young adolescents work hard to develop friendships to avoid that social void. Because “the need for acceptance and peer status is so powerful, that virtually nothing interferes with its pursuit,” (Mitchell, 1974, p. 128), “the adolescent has an emotional dependence upon his peers” (Mitchell, (2001), p. 71).

These betweenagers are looking for safety and security, while they manage their

own cognitive, emotional and social states. They understand where their competencies lie. As betweenagers learn to manage themselves, and as they begin to understand their competencies, they come under outside influences. How these influences affect betweenagers' choices follows.

Influences on Choice Making for Adolescents

Betweenagers are managing their own cognitive, emotional and social states, and they are also looking for safety and security in new social relationships. This emotional dependence on peers is demonstrated in the groups that adolescents form, and in the groups of which they become a part. Adams and Gullotta (1989) categorize four potential groups with which any individual betweenager may fraternize at any given time. These include groups that aim to disconnect from socialization, such as counter culture groups and activist or consumer groups. Friendship groups and cliques as well as groups such as Scouts and Guides are groups that conform to a connection with socialization. No matter which group a student associates with, that group may influence choices that the student makes. As Adams and Gullotta state, these "peers can have potent influence on adolescent's perceptions and behaviour" (p. 98). Pertinent to education, Dusek (1996) says "the influence of the peer group, then, is mediated by mutual reinforcement of a relatively common basic set of notions about the value of education" (p. 357).

Studies conducted regarding influence on choices made by students in grade five found that students would turn to parents for advice on moral issues, other adults on factual or knowledge questions and to peers for social quandries (Adams & Gulotta, 1989, p. 98). Blume and Zembar (2007) looked to the Middle Start Initiative which was completed in 2002 to determine that "researchers have consistently documented that

parents, as supportive adults, continue to be important in encouraging school-age children to engage in activities within safe boundaries” (p. 51), which supports earlier research concerning where these children seek advice on moral issues. Interviews that Mees (2002) conducted, confirmed that these young adolescents are dependent on other adults for factual information, so much so that when asked what administrators in schools could do to make their lives better, the betweenagers responded “get better substitutes” (p. 20), when the substitutes that were employed were deemed by the students to be insufficient in knowledge. However, when these children are looking for social guidance, Kandel, as cited by Adams & Gulotta (1989) stated that “interpersonal influence can emerge from, (1), imitation, in which one person observes the behaviour of another and emulated it, or (2), social reinforcement, in which a person is rewarded for adopting the behaviour or values of another” (p. 97). In regard to social issues, peers maintain the upper hand in influencing young adolescents.

Young people around grade six can self regulate. They are beginning to understand that parents, other significant adults and their peers can offer guidance for choice making, and are beginning to discern where it is most appropriate to go for advice, depending upon the situation.

Motivation and choice. In addition to understanding that parents, other significant adults and peers are influences in choice making for betweenagers, we might also understand motivation in order to begin to understand how and why students make the choices that they make in regard to their optional courses. Maslow’s theory of self-actualization still figures prominently in researchers work on understanding people of all ages. In this theory, the needs of the individual drive the action, and the outcome is the

desired result of the activity, not the process itself but in the activity, students may find “peak experience”. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1993) talk about “flow” and Robinson (2009) talks about finding our “Element”.

The experience of the activity in the pursuit of satisfaction of the need is secondary. “Yet people constantly monitor and evaluate the quality of experience in the stream of consciousness, and we often decide whether to continue or terminate a given behaviour sequence in terms of such evaluations” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993, p. 57). When the experience itself is pleasurable to us, we become instinctually motivated to replicate the experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) coined the term flow, because people who are attracted to replicate experiences that are very challenging physically, emotionally or psychologically, used the metaphor of “a current that carried them along” (p. 58). Flow is defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1993) as “a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue and everything else but the activity itself” (p. 59). When in flow, worries fade away, time stops and the activity becomes “auto-telic, worth doing for its own sake” (p. 60). Robinson (2009) has worked with people to find out more about flow and says that, “you begin to do something you love, and the rest of the world slips away. Hours pass, and it feels like minutes. During this time you have been ‘in the zone’. Those who have embraced the Element find themselves in this place regularly” (p. 89).

Robinson (2009) calls the ‘element’, “the meeting point between natural aptitude and personal passion” (p.21). It is more than finding things easy, or interesting. “When people are in their element, they connect with something fundamental to their sense of identity, purpose, and well-being” (Robinson, 2009, p. 21). When people find their

'element', they will have found not only aptitude and passion, but also attitude and opportunity. Robinson (2009) describes aptitude as "a natural facility for something" (p. 23). Initially, accomplishing the new activity comes easily. More than finding a new task or activity is easily accomplished, there is something about it that the person loves. "Being in your Element needs something more – passion" (Robinson, 2009, p. 24). The activity comes easily and a person loves it. Those are the features of the Element. Then there are the conditions that apply to the 'Element'. Attitude, for Robinson, includes "perseverance, self-belief, optimism, ambition, and frustration" (p. 25). Opportunity might occur because people have taken hold of an opportunity when one presents itself, or the person who has found their element might pave their own way. With an attitude that lends itself to work, and the opportunity to apply oneself to the activity in which one finds aptitude and passion, the conditions are ripe for a person to find their Element.

Maslow also spoke to such a state be it flow, or the zone or the Element, where a "person is totally absorbed - emotionally and intellectually - in an activity" (Blume & Zembar, 2007, p. 134). Blume and Zembar (2007) say that Maslow "believed that children are naturally capable of 'peak experiences', which occur frequently in the school age years" (p. 134). Activities in which we experience flow are activities that we continue to pursue, as in Robinson's (2009) conditions. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) found that those students who found enjoyment in their talent areas, not just accomplishment, were "more likely to keep developing their talents" (p. 79). Finding activities where students experience flow or the Element or peak experiences may be a factor in the choices that students make.

Environment, family and flow. What Dewey (1933) described as the "ideal

mental condition” (p. 286), Maslow calls peak experiences (Blume & Zembar, 2007, p. 134), Csikszentmihlyi (1993) calls flow and Robinson expands as the Element. The ideal mental condition, or peak experiences, or flow, must come from the right combination of “playfulness, enjoyment, and positive feelings along with concentration, seriousness and goal directedness” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rahthunde, 1993, p. 85). Families that are defined as complex are likely to provide an environment where this combination of having fun while working hard is attainable.

A complex family, or one that is “democratic, fair and loving” (Baumrind, as cited in Blume & Zembar, 2007, p. 232), combines attributes of an integrated family with a differentiated family. In an integrated family, children have a sense that they are supported emotionally and experience a family structure that is predictable, with traditions and expectations readily apparent. In a differentiated family, children find themselves in a structure where all members are pursuing their own goals, and they are supported in that, but events are less predictable than in an integrated family.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rahthunde (1993) found that teens raised in a complex family, one that combined the attributes of differentiated and integrated families spent “about nine hours more each week in high skill, high challenge conditions conducive to flow; in addition they spend approximately 8 ½ hours less per week in circumstances more likely to produce apathy” (p. 89). When the right circumstances prevail, students can experience flow as “a form of energy that spurs people to action” (p. 91). As Plato noted long ago, the main task of education is to teach young people to “find pleasure in the right things” (Serwach, 2010). When schools and families provide rich and supportive environments for our young people, chances are that Plato’s goal for education will be

reached.

Family, peers, significant adults, flow, peak experience, finding the Element, the framing of the choice, and background experience are all factors that affect teenagers choice making. Using search engines such as google scholar, and library e-journal sites, I searched for research under factors affecting choices made by adolescents, adolescent choice making, school course choice making, school option choice making, choosing options in middle years, choosing between the arts in schools, and several other search combinations. I finally searched under retention in school music programmes, which led to searching under factors affecting academic choice and I found other folks who have been looking at student choice in their school career.

Factors affecting academic choices. Factors as far reaching as the impression made by the professionals in the field of choice, parental impression of career possibilities in an academic area and peers who are interested in the field have been determined as factors in the choice of academic subjects by adolescents. Cheung (2006) wanted to determine the factors affecting the choices of students in a girls' school in Hong Kong when they had to choose from amongst the science disciplines as they progressed through their school and into University. She used semi-structured interviews in a qualitative study with students in which she interviewed 30 students. These girls were students in the equivalent of Canadian grades 9 through 12. She found that the students took into consideration the grades that they had achieved in each of the disciplines, and which courses would include experiments. The girls preferred the hands on aspect. The girls said that their parents supported their choice of science because they thought their parents perceived scientists as having good job prospects and prestige in the

community. Cheung found that the girls who chose science were members of peer groups that also chose science. Like-minded girls tended to move through courses as a group. Past experience, the opportunity to be involved, parental opinion and the association with like-minded peers were factors in the girls' choices.

Cheung used a qualitative approach to determine how girls in a girls' school made determinations amongst the science disciplines. Olszewski-Kubillus and Yasumoto (1994) used a quantitative research model to determine factors that affect the academic choices of academically talented adolescents in a summer academic program in the United States. The students in the study were 13 or 14 years old, closer in age to the students I am interested in than those in the Cheung study. Only students who were determined through the Scholastic Aptitude Test to be eligible for mathematics science courses or verbal courses offered in a special summer programme for academically talented adolescents were included in the study. Three hundred and ninety four students completed a 12 page questionnaire that collected data regarding demographics, parental attitudes about males' and females' ability and interest in math and science and verbal subjects, previous course work, participation in leisure activities and leisure time math and science activities. A separate questionnaire delved into students' attitudes towards math. Olszewski-Kubillus and Yasumoto found, after the final regression for choice between a math and a verbal course that "two factors were significant, previous educational experience and parental attitudes" (p. 1). As in Cheung's study, the children of parents who valued mathematics or science as more important to their child's future career options were more likely to choose math or science regardless of ability. Particularly, Olszewski-Kubillus and Yasumoto found that "interests, ability, previous

educational experiences and parental attitudes were all implicated as important contributing factors” (p. 2) in the academic choices made by academically gifted adolescents. They also determined that, “one of the most compelling and consistent findings of this study was the influence of parental attitudes about the importance of certain subjects to the child’s future” (p. 2).

Predictors of Music Study

In 1998, Corenblum and Marshall studied the ability of adults to predict the intentions of students to continue studying music. This quantitative study was implemented in a public school setting in Manitoba. The researchers chose to study socioeconomic levels, grades and band teacher ratings as predictor variables. They chose to study parental attitudes, student attitudes, teacher attitudes, and attributions (internal such as ability and effort and external such as task difficulty) as influences on the choice. As in the Olszewski-Kubillus and Yasumoto (1994) study, the students involved in this study were 14 years old. Corenblum and Marshall used a quantitative approach and developed and distributed to 253 students, a questionnaire that was developed to assess the measure of the reliability of the predictors and the level of pervasiveness of the influences on the students’ intentions to remain in band. They also collected data from band teachers that rated the performance of the responding students in band class. Corenblum and Marshall confirmed a relationship between socioeconomic level and retention in band programmes. They stated, “for individuals in privileged positions within the culture, the belief that people should be encouraged to excel at and continue in music and scholastic endeavours seems the right thing to do” (1998, p. 136). They also found that, “the more favourably band teachers evaluated students’ musical competency, the

more likely it was students said they would take band next year” (p. 137). These researchers also determined that, “attitudes did not predict intentions. Perceived parental support, teacher evaluations, and outside musical interests were better predictors than were student attitudes” (p. 137). In conclusion, Corenblum and Marshall determined and highlighted the “importance of associations between socioeconomic level, teacher ratings, outside musical interests and perceived attitudes of significant others on student intentions to continue in band” (p. 138).

Nonmusic Predictors of Enrolling and Persisting in Middle School Band Study

After Kinney (2008) studied selected demographic variables, school music participation and achievement test scores of urban middle school students and confirmed that instrumental music students were generally higher achievers academically than the general population before enrolling in an instrumental programme, and that participation in instrumental music programmes had no detrimental effect on the students test score achievements, Kinney (2010) then studied selected nonmusic predictors of urban students’ decisions to enroll and persist in middle school band programmes. While Olszewski-Kubilus and Yasumoto (1994) looked at these factors as predictors of students’ continued participation in music programmes, Kinney (2010), included socioeconomic status, family structure, mobility ethnicity and gender as predictors not only of persisting in music, but as predictors of enrollment in the first place. In this study, Kinney chose an American school district where 19.2% of the population was considered below the poverty line and two schools in the district that had been identified as ‘in need of improvement’. The two schools shared the same band instructor and housed students in grades 6 through 8 who could choose as an option band beginning in grade 6. This was

a quantitative study incorporating data from the school district including academic achievement, gender, ethnicity, mobility and socioeconomic levels. Data for 402 grade six students and 340 grade eight students were examined for collinearity and then analyzed using logistic regression procedures, univariable analysis and multivariable analysis. Thorough investigation revealed that, “higher reading achievement test scores were associated with a greater likelihood of band membership” (p. 9). It was also determined, that, other variables being equal, for the grade six “students living with two parents or guardians were 2.43 times more likely to be in band than those from single-parent or single-guardian homes” (p. 9). Although Kinney (2010) did not find the statistics to be significant, he found it worthy of mention that “females were 1.43 times more likely to be enrolled in band” (p. 9) in grade six. Socioeconomic status was not determined to be a factor that determined enrollment for grade six students.

At the grade eight level, Kinney (2010) found that “academic achievement may become increasingly salient in predicting students’ participation in band over time. . . . it may be that students who excel academically also are more likely to excel in music” (p. 10). At the grade eight level, Kinney found that, where socioeconomic status was not a predictor of enrollment in band in grade six, it became a factor in grade eight. He speculated that, “although instruments could be provided throughout the students’ middle school career, it may be that other expenses (eg. reeds, valve oil, concert dress, trips) associated with band programmes may have affected negatively the retention of students from a lower SES” (p. 11). He also found that gender became a more significant factor in participation in band in grade eight. He referred to a study by Kessels when he stated that the findings may “reflect gender perceptions that adolescents have toward music in urban

schools that males hold gender-stereotyped perceptions regarding music classes, where participation in music is viewed negatively because it is regarded as feminine” (p. 11).

At both grade levels, academic achievement was a predictor of enrollment and persistence. SES and gender were not a factor of enrollment in grade six, but became factors for grade eight enrollment. Kinney (2010) eliminated mobility and ethnicity as predictors of enrollment or persistence in school music programmes at either level.

Student Engagement as a Predictor of Participation in School Music Study

In Australia at the turn of the century, music study in schools was compulsory until the end of grade eight. Music educators witnessed declining student engagement in middle years music. Hartwig (2003) wanted to do work to increase student engagement in year 8 music classes in Australia. In her action research project, which she undertook as an attempt to improve music education for students in year 8 in Queensland, she noticed that she could not predict which students would choose to continue in music in year 9, even after having been intimately involved with the students in developing music programmes that engaged their interest. She decided to include the reasons behind her student’s choices as part of her qualitative study. Her students indicated that scheduling was the top issue for them in their course choices for the next year. They made statements such as: “‘I didn’t have enough room to do music.’ ‘Because I couldn’t fit it in my schedule.’ ‘Had other subject to do’” (p. 124). When Hartwig (2003) asked the students why they chose not to take music after their year 8 programme, the students indicated parental influence, such as “‘My mum said not to do it.’ Or ‘My mum said there was no future in music.’ and ‘because of my parents. They chose my subjects without me

knowing what they were” (p. 124). Hartwig noted “that none of the student responses had anything to do with not liking music” (p. 125). There was also no indication that the students had lost interest in music, or in making music. She stated that “the students’ choices need to be made on accurate information and timetabling needs to be structured so that it does not disadvantage music and arts subject selections” (p. 125).

Retention in Music Programmes

While Kinney (2010) stated, “few studies have examined the non music factors influencing students’ initial decisions to enroll in instrumental music electives,” (p. 3) there has been work, besides that of Hartwig, done around retaining students in programmes once they have chosen a band programme. Boyle, DeCarbo and Jordan (1995) at the University of Miami understand that “the high dropout rate in instrumental music programmes is a continuing concern for instrumental music teachers” (p. 1). Boyle and colleagues surveyed band teachers, as did SBO magazine, to find teachers’ impressions of the reasons for students leaving band programmes.

Boyle, DeCarbo and Jordan (1995) found that the results of their survey of band directors supported the findings of previous research. Their survey confirmed that students drop out of band programmes as a result of “loss of interest, scheduling conflicts and lack of parental support” (p. 4). The findings of the *Survey: Recruitment and Retention* (2003) supported Boyle et al.’s findings. Band directors in that survey cited loss of interest, scheduling issues (known as curriculum crowding) and financial reasons, which could be a result of lack of parental support.

Loss of interest, scheduling conflicts and lack of parental support were all cited previous to Boyle’s survey. What was new to this group of researchers was that band

directors perceived that the major contributor to student drop out was “lack of commitment to work” (p. 4). While the *Survey: Recruitment and Retention* (2003) attributed financial concerns to lack of parental support, Boyle et al. (1995) consider that “lack of parental support may be a contributing factor to lack of commitment to work” (p. 5). In the *Survey: Recruitment and Retention* the writers were more blunt. They equated the lack of commitment to work as laziness.

In both surveys, scheduling figured highly as a precursor of a student’s dropping band. Whether band was scheduled against a required course, or scheduled outside of school time, against sport team practices or timetabled as a pull-out programme, scheduling was an issue for students. The scheduling of sectionals and a requirement of daily practice (which could be attributed to the aforementioned laziness) were also noted as issues. Sichivitsa (2003) surveyed university choral students and found the same problem. “For students who were unsure about their re-enrollment in the choral class or students who were not going to re-enroll, the decision was mainly influenced by nonmusical factors such as scheduling problems or graduation” (p. 339).

Although not high on the list of concerns, the contact, or lack thereof, of the students with the band director of their future was also cited. Either the students felt no connection with the band programme (and its director) to which they would graduate, or they had had a negative experience with their future director, and thus withdrew before having to make the choice to go on. Apparently, even in university, the director is a factor in student retention in a music programme. Sichivitsa found that “students who were satisfied with the conductor’s professionalism, the level of musical material, and their own performance were more likely to enjoy socializing with the members of the choir

and the conductor” (p. 339) and thus were more likely to remain in the programme.

In some studies, scheduling issues seem paramount in the decision to remain in a music programme. Socioeconomic levels and parental support or lack thereof also contributes to the decision to remain in a programme. In rare instances did the director of the programme or the programme itself factor as a reason for leaving a programme, however, one must remain cognizant that the surveys cited were conducted by the band directors themselves. The musical giftedness or talent of the participants in the programmes did not seem to be an issue in the retention of students in music programmes.

In the literature review I outlined the role of music in our lives and the role music education can play in the lives of students. I outlined the elementary and middle years music programmes in the school division in which the study took place. Choice, particularly as it pertains to adolescents was described. Adolescents and the factors that influence their choice making were described. Studies referring particularly to student choice making in the area of academics and music education and in the retention of students in music programmes were described. I will now turn to the research methods used in this study.

Chapter 3: The Method

A research proposal is only such, if the “description of the method is clear, comprehensible and comprehensive” (Freebody, 2003, p. 68). I therefore delineate the problem, research approach, ontological and epistemological assumptions surrounding this topic, and my bias. The “planning, design, analysis and dissemination” (Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009, p. 14) of the knowledge gleaned is explained here in as clear and concise a manner as possible.

The Problem

Educators and school leaders have not studied students’ perspectives on how they make their choices regarding course options as they enter middle years schools or junior high school, nor how students feel about having to make those choices. The aim of this study was to determine the reasons students choose, or do not choose, music education as an option for their middle years education and the students’ perspectives on those options. The questions to be answered were: “what are students’ perspectives on their course options as they enter grade seven”, “what factors encourage students to choose music as an option in their middle years schooling?” and, “what factors discourage students from choosing music as an option during their middle years schooling?” To gather multiple perspectives and to deepen my understanding of the research questions, the perspectives of teachers were also gathered by asking “what are music educators’ and band teachers’ perspectives on choice for students after grade six, particularly as they relate to music options?” At the time this study was initiated, there was no current research that I was able to locate that specifically addressed these questions from the perspective of the student, therefore there is no theory nor hypothesis suggested on this

problem. Consequently, the approach to this research study required careful consideration.

The Research Approach

In this study of the problem of student and teacher perspective and choice regarding arts options in grade seven, I used a qualitative constructivist/interpretive approach. As indicated in the introduction and literature review, I could only guess why students leaving grade six choose, or do not choose, music as an option for their course of study in grade seven. Hoepfl (1997) paraphrases Strauss and Corbin, saying that “qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known” (p. 2). Andrade (2009) states that an interpretive approach to research “provides a deep insight” (p. 43) into, as Schwandt (1994) said, “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (p. 43). This is accomplished by using “inductive data analysis” and having an “interpretive character, aimed at discovering the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them, and the interpretations of those meanings by the researcher” (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 2). Hoepfl also states that in qualitative research “the researcher seeks to observe and interpret meanings in context” with “primary questions to be explored and plans for data collection strategies” (p.3). Graham and Thomas (2008), Hoepfl, and Andrade all agree that in studies designed with an interpretive stance, “the researcher acts as the ‘human instrument’ of data collection” (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 2). I designed this study with an interpretive approach in which, after I collected data, I used data analyses to understand student and teacher perspectives on choice of options as they enter grade seven.

Any theory that I might have articulated would be influenced by my own

experience with my own children and my own students. I was, therefore, mindful of theoretical sensitivity throughout the process. Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher.”One can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity, depending upon previous reading and experience with a relevant area” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 41) of study. As reminded by Strauss and Corbin, theoretical sensitivity refers to “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and the capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (p. 44). According to Hoepfl (1997), Strauss and Corbin believe that

theoretical sensitivity comes from a number of sources, including professional literature, professional experiences, and personal experiences. The credibility of a qualitative research report relies heavily on the confidence readers have in the researcher’s ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field (p. 3).

I came to the research situation with a certain knowledge base, including the reading that I did for this study, my personal history, my history with my own children, my history with my students, and my stated bias. Through theoretical sensitivity I acknowledged and accounted for my own experience with my own children and my own students. My role was to bring what I have experienced and what I have read to the data. I also acknowledged my bias as that hoping that students choose music for grade seven.

Through this study I attempted to incorporate theoretical sensitivity and, in doing so also include connoisseurship. “Connoisseurship” as coined by Eisner is “the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities” (1998, p. 63). It is also “the art of appreciation . . . a matter of noticing, and noticing requires perceptivity.

Perceptivity is the ability to differentiate and to experience the relationships, between say, one gustatory quality in the wine and another” (p. 63). Connoisseurship is a combination of discrimination, appreciation and perceptivity, and it is the discrimination and perceptivity that delineates appreciation from simply liking something. In connoisseurship, appreciation includes understanding something about situations and “making judgments about their value” (Eisner 1998, p. 68). “Nothing in connoisseurship as a form of appreciation requires that our judgments be positive. What is required (or desired) is that our experience be complex, subtle, and informed” (p. 68). In this study, I did not have to like that some students chose music, nor dislike that some students did not, what I had to do was perceive and discriminate from the data the subtleties and complexities of the processes, information and decisions that the students shared with me, and organize the data in a way that denotes an appreciation for the work that students do in the choosing of an arts option.

The people who had the answers to my questions, and who were the source of the data were children and teachers. Because children were involved in the study, I considered that much care had to be taken in the understanding of the methodology for the study. Methodology is not to be confused with method. Methodology is a “set of procedures, practices and principles for obtaining knowledge about the world” (Tisdall et al., 2009, p. 66). In determining the methodology for this project, the procedures, practices and principles included the delineation of “common ontological and epistemological assumptions” along with the “planning, design, analysis and dissemination” (Tisdall et al., 2009, p. 69) of the knowledge gleaned from the study.

As already stated, a research proposal must be clear, comprehensible and

comprehensive. To be comprehensive, Freebody (2003) suggests it must include ontological and epistemological assumptions surrounding the project. I will now turn to a discussion of the ontological assumptions and the epistemological position that I considered for this study.

Ontological assumptions. The expected participants and the assumptions about the nature and being of those participants in the study are listed here. Students are involved in the decision-making regarding the course options they will be engaged in during their grade seven year. Because this project focused on music education as one of the options, it is also assumed that elementary music educators' knowledge had a place in the study. Junior high music educators may have some knowledge regarding the decision making process as well, and thus were included in the study.

The focus of this study concerned students, sometimes referred to, in this document, as 'participants' and their perspectives on the choices they made regarding course options as they entered grade seven. It was important to define who these students are for the purposes of this research. These students were just completing grade seven, or the eighth year of their formal schooling. They were students in a school division that offers formal music education in its elementary schools. There was no assumption as to the focus or the extent of the elementary music education that they received. There were also no assumptions about any private music training they may or may not have received. They were students who had to declare a choice related to subject area options as they entered their eighth year of formal schooling. These were students who were and continue to be experts in their own lives and were fully capable of conveying their knowledge, thoughts and opinions regarding making choices about school courses.

Elementary music educators who shared their perspectives with me were from the same school division as the students involved in the study. The music educators may or may not have been long-term influences on the students' lives. They may or may not have taught the students who chose to take part in the study. There was no assumption as to the music educator's approach to music education, their background, or training. Elementary music educators may or may not have consciously attempted to advise their students as to their junior high school course options. Elementary music educators may or may not have exhibited a passion regarding their students' continued participation in music education after their grade six, or year seven year.

Junior high school music educators taking part in the study were band teachers in the same school division as the other participants in the study. They may or may not have taken an active role in the choices that the students in their feeder schools made. There was no assumption as to what type of music education the junior high school provides. There was no assumption that the music educators screen students in their programmes as to ability.

Epistemological assumptions. To understand students' perspectives on optional courses for grade seven and what factors they took into consideration when making decisions regarding their junior high school course options, I needed to talk to the students. My assumption is that only the students themselves could tell me what their experience of the decision making process was. I also assumed that the students would know what outside influences were aids or detriments to their decision-making. Only the students themselves could tell me if they had all the information they needed, or if indeed they had any relevant information at all. Only the students themselves could tell me of

their view of the value music education, or, tell me if and why they did not value music education enough to continue its study. Only students could tell me what they thought their music education would “look like” in grade seven. Their views, regarding information and or encouragement, or otherwise, from elementary school staff and other adults in their lives could be expressed only by the students. The participants’ intimate knowledge of their dealings with their peers, their friends, their contemporaries, their families, was known only to them. Their knowledge of their world, their context, their experience was crucial to this research.

Gathering the perspectives of both students and music educators was necessary for gathering multiple perspectives and deepening my understanding of the research questions. This is sometimes called practicing triangulation. Bogden and Biklen (2007) guard against using the term, but say it can mean “that many sources of data were better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena” (p. 115). Creswell (2007) suggests that using strategies including “confirming, or triangulating data from several sources” (p.45) is a legitimate validation strategy. In keeping with this practice, I gathered data from four participant sub-groups. I used two different interview methods, attempted to employ rigorous data collection procedures, and kept detailed data. I focused on the participants’ views and revealed their voice in the findings. I included knowledge and information from elementary music educators and middle years band teachers, coupled with knowledge from the students, to close gaps in my perception. These people could offer information regarding their approach, or their schools’ approach to informing their grade six or year seven students regarding course options in junior high school. These people could inform the researcher

if they are fully cognizant of the options available to their students, and which junior high schools offer what possible options. The band teachers held knowledge regarding communication with elementary schools in general and with grade six students in particular. These people might also inform the researcher as to what their staff's intentions were, regarding keeping their students well informed.

The research approach I have taken in this study has been outlined as interpretive in the constructivist tradition employing theoretical sensitivity and connoisseurship. The ontological assumptions about the participants and their epistemological place in the study have been noted. It has been acknowledged that the researcher's experience, knowledge and bias are part of the research process. I now turn to delineating my position in this study.

The Researcher and Bias

My personal experience and desires led to this research study. My own family heritage contributed to an embracing of music, and music education, on many levels. On one side of my family, people played by ear, and played in bands and ensembles at house parties and barn and community dances. The preferred genres on this side of the family were old time fiddle and country music and mid twentieth century swing and big band music. On the other side, the family members were trained musicians who listened to classical music and who participated in community orchestras and church choirs. As a child and teenager in a small town, school music education consisted of the rare listening to CBC school music broadcasts. I did have access to and encouragement in private lessons and community music making in choirs and a town band. I remember longing for the opportunity to make music at school, as the kids in the big city did.

My own children had the opportunity to study music at school, and through my insistence, they remained in a school music option through grades seven and eight. None of these three children chose to continue in music through high school, though they had support at home, encouragement from the music faculty at the high school that they attended, and friends who participated in the music options at their high school. I acknowledge my regret and sadness in that regard. I still think that they missed a wonderful opportunity to make music with their peers. I also can honestly say that they have never given me a straight answer as to why they did not choose music.

In my experience as a music and physical educator at a K-9 school in the school division where this study took place, I found that I could not predict which of my students would choose the band option in grade seven. My observation was that, at times, those who struggled the most with musical literacy chose band, yet some of those who seemed destined for the jazz band programme, through their demonstrations of musical literacy and their ability to improvise and compose, chose art.

These children, my own, and my students who I thought I knew well from long and varied exposure, did not choose as I predicted, nor, as I would have chosen for them. My bias comes from a place where I think that I benefitted greatly from my musical education. I regret not having had a school music experience as is provided in many schools now. I regret that my children did not avail themselves of this opportunity. I believe that students gain many benefits from the study of music. I find that, though I hope that my own students will choose a music route in grade seven, and work toward that goal, and that I think that I know them well, I cannot predict who will choose music. To learn what the student's perspectives are on their options are for grade seven, and to

find out what factors influence the choices that they made, and how their music educators' perspectives and understandings align with those of their students, I had to consciously and consistently be cognizant of my beliefs and biases throughout the interviews, focus groups and data analysis. I also had to be aware of my place in the study.

I am a member of the staff of the school division involved in this study, and have been teaching music and physical education at the elementary level for thirteen years in the school division. Because I have been a member of professional educational organization executives in both music and physical education, and have presented professional development workshops in both areas, and have taught as a sessional instructor at both the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, there may have been a certain amount of name recognition attached to my requests for participants for the focus groups. Because I work in the school division in which the study has taken place, some of the parents who received information about student participation in the study may also have recognized my name. I do not know if that name recognition would influence volunteering to participate in the study negatively or positively.

As Denzin (1978b) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted, the qualitative researcher must acknowledge bias and the part played in the various processes of the study. Because of my bias and because I was working with people, particularly children, in the study, I also acknowledged the ethical issues surrounding the study.

Ethical Issues

As I considered the procedures for this project, I reminded myself that, "research is an intervention into ongoing activities in the world, not a passive portrait of them"

(Freebody, 2003, p. 67). From the onset of the planning for this study, not only was the process intervening in the activities of the world, I was intervening in the world generally and, because I was conducting the study, I was intervening in the study specifically. Because I was part of the research project, I was part of the research. At every step in the process, I attempted to be conscious that I was part of the research, and that I had to be cognizant of my interests, my needs and my biases and how they related to the procedures and the practices of the study. I reminded myself to be continuously aware of how my intervention, my being part of the study, affected the context of the study, the categories found in the study and the concepts which developed from the study. A first guiding principle for this study was the conscious application of the awareness of my intervention in the context.

Because it is impossible to be passive in the process it was imperative that I consciously considered how I would conduct my actions within the context of the study. As outlined in the Tri-council policy statement for ethical content for research involving humans, 2010, I continuously guided the events of the study in a principled manner. This included behaviour that embodied respect for persons, beneficence and justice (Health Canada: Belmont Report, 2010) with regard to the processes and the individuals participating in the study. This was crucial when working with the children. “Children are widely viewed as more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse than adults” (Tisdall et al., 2009, p.14). To demonstrate respect, or to “treat with regard, esteem and honour” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1979, p. 2013), with which I held the participants, I was prompt in returning email and phone messages. I accommodated participants’ wishes for meeting times and preference for meeting places. I was on time for each interview and

accommodated participant or family desire for social visits, clarifications and questions after the interviews. Part of our contract was to offer the participants a summary of the study in thanks for and demonstrating respect for their participation in the study. I was prompt in sending thank you notes to the participants. I established beneficence, or demonstrated “active kindness” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1979, p. 201), by changing meeting times when requested and by meeting the students in their homes while their parents were present. Justice, or “being morally just” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1979, p. 1523), was achieved through the respect and beneficence demonstrated through the project. By being consciously mindful of being respectful, kind and fair throughout the events of the study, I hope that the people involved in the study felt valued in all processes of the study.

In addition to principles of respect, beneficence and justice, some principles specific to this study applied. As influenced by the National Children’s Board of Britain’s Research Document (2008), I was committed to hearing the views of all children, inclusive of ability, gender, culture and ethnicity. I was also committed to including those adults who may play a role in the decision making of the children.

Through the study, I conducted myself with an attitude of gratitude and thanks rather than one of expectation and entitlement. Though this necessitated more patience than I usually muster, it was important, especially in my dealings with the children, in order that they felt relaxed and in control of the information that they chose to share with me. The procedures and practices of the study came under the umbrella of these guiding principles.

Some of the procedures ensuring ethical practice for this project included the

submission of this proposal to my advisory committee, the subsequent approval of the proposal by my committee, submissions to the University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board, and subsequently a request to the urban school division that was studied for permission to perform research with their students and staff in their buildings. Permission to conduct the study, including recruiting of the participants, was requested from the Superintendent's department of the school division (Appendix A). Pursuant to acquiring that permission, permission was obtained from principals in the school division to recruit participants, both professional staff and students, from their population (Appendix B). Subsequent to receiving that permission, further details of the planning and the design of the study were set in motion.

Through my preliminary work on the research approach, on how my bias would affect the study and on the ethics involved, Freebody (2003) reminded me that the practices in which I engaged were to be respectful, ethical and objective in nature according to the principles already outlined, and were to lead to empirical and rigorous responses to the data collected. The procedures used for data gathering and recording of this data follow.

Recruitment of Participants

I collected data from four groups of participants. Students and teachers were the general groups of people that were needed. It was important to have students who had made a choice of option for grade seven, therefore the sample of students needed to include students who had been in grade seven. It was important that the choice not be too much in the past, so the participants would be more likely to remember their experiences around making their choices for grade seven options. To invite such students to the study,

a formal letter (Appendix C), was sent to all band teachers in middle years or junior high settings in the school division of choice, through which they were asked to participate in the study in two ways. First, they were asked to help with the recruitment of six participants who were students in their grade seven music programme. It was hoped that by having every band teacher in the division involved in the recruiting of the participants for the interviews, students from across the division from a variety of schools would participate. It was also hoped that a mix of male and female, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status would be represented. The band teachers received packages of information for students who became interested in participating in the study. These packages included information for prospective students regarding the study (Appendix D), information for the parents of the prospective participants, (Appendix E), assent and consent forms (Appendix F) and suggested interview scheduling information (Appendix G) for interested students and their parents. The band teachers were asked to read a script (Appendix H) outlining the project and the level of involvement for their students. The band teachers were asked to provide a space where the packages for prospective participants were readily available to the students at times when the music educator was not present. This was necessary to preclude any feeling of coercion on behalf of the students and to preserve the students' anonymity.

Secondly, these band teachers were asked to participate in a focus group conversation. The information regarding the focus group for the middle years music teachers was sent to every middle years school in the division, in hopes that teachers from across the division and from a variety of schools would participate in the study, and that at least six educators would reply in the affirmative to participation in the focus group,

six being, according to Stewart, Shamdisani, and Rook (2007) as the minimum number of participants needed to stimulate good discussion and generate rich data. Information regarding the focus group (Appendix C), consent forms (Appendix I) for participation in the focus group and suggested scheduling information (Appendix J) were included in the larger package of materials sent to them.

Recruiting six students who have chosen options other than music was not as straightforward as recruiting the music students. For this group of students, I hoped that students from across the division from a variety of schools would participate. I also hoped that both genders, and a range of ethnicity and socioeconomic status would be represented. I enlisted the help of junior high staff members, one from each of the middle years school in the division, with whom I have come into contact over the years. In schools where I did not have such a contact I enlisted the help of the band teacher in that building to suggest a likely person. Through a formal letter, (Appendix K) these people were asked to help with the recruitment of grade seven students who were not enrolled in music education at their school. These teachers received the same script and packages of materials for interested students as did the music educators, with the exception of the information for prospective participants not currently in music (Appendix L). That portion of the package was subtly different from the information for the students currently in music. The educators were also asked to provide a space where the packages were readily available to their students during private moments. Letters to prospective helpers in recruitment and packages of information for participants were sent to twenty-five staff members in eleven schools that house middle years students.

After having contact with student participants, appointment times were arranged.

When discussing the appointment dates and times, the participants were reminded that the location of the interview would be an appropriate location of their choosing, in consultation with their parents. The interview times were all scheduled in early summer of 2011. The interview process did not interfere with student's classes or summer activities.

The elementary music educators in the same urban school division were asked to participate in a focus group conversation. Letters outlining the research and requesting their participation were sent to music educators in twenty-one of the twenty-three schools housing both elementary music specialists and grade six students (Appendix M). These letters included Informed Consent forms (Appendix N) and proposed schedules for the focus group. (Appendix J). I work as the music specialist in the other two elementary schools housing students in grade six, therefore letters were not necessary for those schools. As was done for the middle years music educators, each elementary educator in the school division was invited to participate in the focus group in the hope of gaining the rich data necessary for a qualitative study.

Each of the participants was aware that their privacy and their anonymity would be protected. Information in the documents about the study outlined the ways in which I would maintain the participants' anonymity. Communication was handled with the participants through Canada Post and home phone numbers rather than the school division mail system and school phones and email addresses. All participants received a reminder from me at the beginning of each of the interviews, that I would do everything possible, including the use of pseudonyms in the study, to protect their privacy and identity.

Data Collection

For this study, two methods of data collection were chosen. The methods for data collection for one-on-one interviews and for the focus group interviews are outlined here.

The one-on-one interviews. I used a “non-scheduled standardized interview” (Denzin, 1978, p. 172). This was most appropriate for the student participants because the interviewer works with a fixed list of questions or problems to be covered, but alters that list and rephrases questions for each respondent. This strategy has the benefit of eliciting common information, grounded in the perspective of those observed (p. 178).

The design of the one-on-one interview questions reflected Spradley’s (1978) funnel model of questioning, beginning with grand tour questions, and gradually focusing on the specifics of the choice of options. The interview protocols for the student students who enrolled in music (Appendix O) and the students who did not enroll in music (Appendix P) differed slightly.

The focus group interviews. The second method of data collection chosen for this study was the focus group. In a focus group, the participants discuss a common topic of interest initiated by the researcher. According to Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) this discussion in a group can lead to more and deeper types of information than an interview, because of the feedback that the participants receive from each other. The discussions of two focus groups in the study, that of the elementary music educators and the band teachers, were led by semi-structured and funnel type protocols which were developed to coincide with the interview protocols for the student actors, artists and musicians for deepening my understanding of the data.

The conversation in the focus group with the elementary music educators was guided by the protocol in Appendix Q. I focused on the music educators' views of their students as they enter middle years or junior high school, whether there is a conscious effort to guide their students' choices, whether they 'identify' students or not, and whether there is general encouragement for continued music study or not. Conversation in the focus group with the middle years music educators was guided by the protocol in Appendix R and focused on the music educators' descriptions of programmes, their views of the students who choose their programmes, whether there is a conscious effort to make connections with the elementary schools that feed their schools, and whether there is a conscious effort recruit students into their programmes.

Recording the data. All one-on-one interviews were audio-taped on a Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber. These conversations were then transcribed fully to written text by me. The conversations were guided by the interview protocols for students in a middle years music programme (Appendix O) and for those subjects who chose not to take music (Appendix P). My experience in the interview situation and the resulting transcriptions and data from the early interviews informed and refined the interview protocol as the study unfolded. Although pilot interviews had been completed in a prior related preliminary study, I found that the fine-tuning of the questioning process resulted in richer data, and the order of the questions in the interview protocols were adjusted as necessary.

The focus group conversations with elementary music educators and with band teachers in the participating school division of choice were audio-recorded using the Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber and were also video recorded using a Sony camera.

As noted in the Robert Wood Johnson (2011) document, “video will be helpful for identifying who is speaking. Recordings also provide access to nuances of the discussion and the ability to replay sessions for analysis.” The video recording was used to clarify speakers in the focus group conversation and to back up the data from the Transcriber. Each conversation was transcribed to written text by the researcher. The conversation was guided by the protocols found in Appendices Q & R.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. These pseudonyms were used in hand written notes, transcriptions of the data, field notes, memos, and the final thesis document. All data, including interview audio and video-tapes and memos were kept in a locked and secure location in my home. The audio and videotapes from one-on-one interviews and from the focus groups will be destroyed upon completion and defense of this study. All transcribed materials will be shredded, as will the completed surveys. Because all completed written forms were returned in stamped, self-addressed envelopes, there has been complete anonymity.

Data Analysis

The management of the data for this study included several steps. A file drawer dedicated to the project was set with colour-coded folders for each of the sub-groups. The transcriptions of the conversations and focus group were typed using the Panasonic transcriber with the video recordings for clarification of speakers and nuances in the focus groups. I numbered each line of the each of the transcriptions. After each conversation was fully transcribed, I made a copy of each transcription, the original remaining pristine for future photocopies, if necessary, the copy for observer’s comments, hand written coding of themes, and categories. When the coding was

complete, copies of the coded transcriptions were made. These copies of the coded work were colour coded as to group and participant. These colour-coded copies were cut and sorted as to the themes and categories in place and were used for secondary coding analysis and the subsequent identification of trends.

The initial stages of my analysis of the data included writing memos after each interview. Included in these memos were descriptions of my informants and the setting in which our conversation took place. I also wrote about my impressions and my thoughts about whether I was hearing what the participants had to say or whether I was hearing what I wanted to hear. In this way I tried to keep my personal history, my professional reading and my views separate from the data collection. I used these memos and thought processes to scrutinize my interview technique. The use of these memos became one of my tools for bracketing, my opportunity to hold “each of the identified phenomena up for serious inspection” (Bednall, 2006, p. 2), and provided the opportunity to “reflect on my own positionality” (BERA, 2011, p. 1) through the process of analysis. The memos were also useful in the initial determination of emerging themes and trends in the data. Along with the memos I used thematic analysis.

I used basic thematic analysis of the data. An initial examination of each transcription was implemented to determine key themes for which codes were developed. I was ever mindful of the purpose and questions of the study as I considered the key themes that were beginning to be identified. As key themes emerged, and categories of statements and responses from the informants were laid out, the colour-coded photocopies of the coded transcriptions were cut into strips and compiled under the categories to determine trends. As each theme and category was determined, they were

interpreted in terms of the purpose and questions of the study. The themes and categories and their codes can be found at Appendix S. The themed data were interpreted to make some sense as to what factors encourage students to choose music as an option in their middle years schooling, what factors discourage students from choosing music as an option during their middle years' schooling and student perspectives on their course options as they enter grade seven.

In summary, I used an interpretive, constructivist, qualitative research approach, utilizing an interview protocol with two groups of six students, each of whom had just completed grade seven, one group of six subjects who were involved in music education (Appendix O) , one group of six subjects who chose another arts option (Appendix P). The interviews were transcribed, and the data analyzed for key themes. Two groups of adults significant to the study, elementary music specialists and middle years band teachers were participants in two focus groups (Appendices Q & R). The data from these two groups informed and strengthened the data from the student groups.

Standards of Quality

I wanted the findings of this study to be useful and applicable to music educators and to those people who work with students in grade six in preparing these betweenagers for the choices that they face in the spring and summer of their grade six year. To be useful, the method and the results needed to exhibit rigour, or “trustworthiness” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Strategies to ensure this trustworthiness were woven into the research strategy, rather than as a tool for post-hoc evaluation (Morse, Barret, Mayan, et al. (2002). Morse, Barrett, Mayan, et al. (2002) reminded me that Guba and Lincoln’s “work on ‘trustworthiness’ is still regarded as seminal and pertinent” (p. 8).

Seale (2002) and Trochim (2006) summarized approaches to incorporating Guba and Lincoln's criteria for qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity, into the research process. I incorporated these criteria into this study through means described below.

Trochim (2006) states that credibility "involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable" (pg. 1). This is achieved in the process of conducting a study by "prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation and triangulation exercises, as well as exposure of the research report to criticism by a disinterested peer reviewer (Seale, 2002, p. 104). I conducted one-on-one interviews with the pre-determined number of students and two focus groups. During these conversations, I employed paraphrasing and rephrasing questions tools for checking for meaning with the participants. Meaning checking was also employed when I asked participants to rephrase or "tell me again" when I was felt further understanding on my part was needed. In two instances, after transcription, phone calls were made to student participants to clarify meanings of some statements. Where appropriate, the data derived from these participant groups were used in triangulation exercises to ensure credibility.

Transferability, "the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings" (Trochim, 2006, p.2) is achieved through "providing a detailed, rich description of the setting studies, so that readers are given sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of findings to other settings that they know" (Seale, 2002, p. 105). It is also achieved by "doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research (Trochim, 2006, p.2). To achieve the transferability of this study, thorough descriptions

of the research context, the assumptions made about the participants and descriptions of the participants and their schools are included in this document.

The dependability of the research process develops from an approach where the researcher accounts “for the ever-changing context within which research occurs” (Trochim, 2006, p.2). Dependability in this study was approached by constantly auditing the decisions made through the study. The method, the research approach and the assumptions made prior to conducting the study were examined and re-examined. The decisions made regarding the findings were also examined, and re-examined. This constant examination of the study as it unfolded was an exercise in “reflexivity, which involves the provision of a methodologically self-critical account of how the research was done” (Seale, 2002, p.105).

By outlining my positionality and bias in the study, I have approached reflexivity. Reflexivity is the act of wondering “how our own perspective and experiences enter into, transform or change the issue or area being investigated” (Sullivan, 2002, p. 1). Reflexivity was enhanced in several ways. I consciously applied Denzin’s (1978b) ‘theoretical sensitivity’ and Eisner’s (1998) ‘connoisseurship’, to the processes of this study. I fully appreciated the contributions of the participants, and was sensitive to the nuances and subtleties of meaning and my place in the data that the participants provided. I used verification strategies such as post interview memos, and meaning checking such as paraphrasing and rephrasing questions during the interviews. By consciously applying reflexivity, I enhanced the possibility that this study included credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity. To further that possibility, I incorporated the technique of the triangulation of data.

Triangulation of data. “Researchers don’t want to be inaccurate, caught without confirmation” (Stake, 2008, p. 133). To guard against inaccuracy in this study, and promote credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity within the study, triangulation was employed. “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, p. 133).

In this study, four subsets of participants were chosen: students who chose music, students who did not choose music, elementary music educators and middle years music educators. Two methods of gaining data were used, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews, and focus groups. When the themes and categories were determined from the memos and transcriptions, the data from all the participant sources were compared and contrasted. These procedures were implemented to ensure triangulation of data. Triangulation of data “forces the observer to combine multiple data sources, research methods and theoretical schemes in the inspection and analysis” (Denzin, 1978, p. 21) of the data. Triangulation reflects an “attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (Denzin, 2008 p. 7). According to Denzin, the inclusion of different perspectives and observers “in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry” (p. 7). In this study, the triangulation of information from four groups, in addition to theoretical sensitivity and connoisseurship, informed the analyses of the data.

Limitations of the Methodology

I found this study very interesting. I was pleasantly surprised and pleased with the response to my requests for participation in the study given the time of year. The

information I was offered by these students and by the members of the focus groups was freely given and copious. The findings were unexpected and informative. Having said that, there are limitations to any study, and the limitations of this study are included here.

The sample of participants in the study was limited by the scope of the study and by the numbers of schools that responded positively to the recruitment of participants. Of twenty schools housing grade six students in the school division of the study, five of the schools or one quarter of the schools were represented by student participants. Of eight schools housing grade seven students, four schools were represented by student participants in the study. There were six female and four male student participants, giving a good split as to gender. Based upon my observations and our conversations in their homes, these student participants were all children in families with married parents, who lived in detached, single family dwellings in suburban areas, therefore the sample was quite homogenous. The results are transferable only to similar participant groups. The participants in the elementary music educator focus group represented one half of the schools housing grade six students. The focus group for band teachers was small at three members, and represented less than half of the school division's middle years schools. While I was satisfied with the numbers of student participants and elementary music educators, ideally there would have been more participants in the band teacher focus group.

The University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Ethics board and my thesis advisory group leant an audit process to the method for this study, but I was the only person analyzing the data. There was no replication of data gathering or peer audits of the data. Having stated the limitations of the study, I now present the findings of my study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Overview

I was able to collect data because two institutions and several individuals gave me permission and consent to conduct research and to be part of the study. That information is included here. The data transcribed from twelve interviews and two focus groups were analyzed with reference to the themes and categories that emerged from the data. The categories and themes as they relate to the research questions are revealed here as is other pertinent information that surfaced in the analysis of the data. Information pertaining to what factors encourage students to choose music as an option, what factors discourage students from taking music as an option and how students feel about having to make that choice is foremost in this section.

The themes that emerged in the analysis of the data include: school experience in grade seven, school experience in elementary school, the factors affecting the choice of option, the factors discouraging a choice of option, assessment issues and perceptions regarding options.

In this chapter, all of the participants, both students and teachers, are identified by pseudonyms. If any of the participants identified a person, or a school in their comments, those references are included in the data analysis by assigning a description to that person, or place. That description is placed in parenthesis in the analysis.

In the spirit of incorporating connoisseurship, it is important to present the voices of the student and teacher participants. Much of what they told me is included here. Only portions of our conversations that had no relevance to the study have been excluded.

Participation Data

Before the study could begin, several steps for approval and permission for the study were gained. The approval certificate from the Office of the Vice-President for Research at the University of Manitoba was received on June 10th, 2011. Permission from the office of the superintendent of the school division in which the study occurred was received June 17, 2011. Permission from school principals in the school division to request help from their staff in recruiting students and to become members of focus groups were received in stages over the course of the rest of June. As permission from principals was received, letters requesting participation and requesting assistance with recruiting of the student participants were distributed. Though by this time of year, grade seven students are out of their school buildings on a regular basis, fourteen responses from interested student participants had been received by mid July. Eight of these responses were from students involved in music programmes in grade seven and six responses were from students who had participated in other arts options in grade seven.

The student participants were notified of this opportunity, as outlined in the method, by some of my colleagues in the school division in which the study took place. Three of these colleagues also agreed to give of their time to the focus group of middle years music educators. Seven colleagues agreed to participate in a focus group of elementary music educators.

The student participants. The twelve students who assented, and whose parents consented to their children's participation in this study, shared several characteristics. Those similarities, noted from observations during my home visits for their interviews, were: each participant lived in a single, detached dwelling in a suburb of Winnipeg, and

the families of the students appeared to be traditional families in that all participants' parents were married and the participants lived with both parents.

The students came from four middle years schools. Five of the girls, April, Emma, Deborah, Jenna and Sarah, who participated in this study, came from a grade 7-9 school that housed English and French programmes with art, band and drama as its options. These five girls also shared their elementary school experience, all attended from Kindergarten through grade six at a K- 6 English school in the division. Three of the students came from a K-9 English school. Thaddeus and Carrie had attended the same school since Kindergarten. Ruth had a variety of elementary school experiences, her father being in the armed forces, and had joined Thaddeus and Carrie in grade six. Two boys in the study attended a 5-9 French school, but came from two different French elementary schools. Fergus attended a K-4 French Immersion school and Sam, a K-6 French Immersion school. The last two participants, Brett and Melanie, both attended the same K-6 English school, and then the same 7-9 English middle years school.

The focus groups. All of the music teachers in the elementary and middle years schools in the division were invited to participate in a focus group. The elementary schools in the division were well represented in the focus group for elementary music specialists. Of twenty-one schools in the division that house grade six students, there are seventeen schools in which grade six students must make a choice regarding course options in grade seven. Of these seventeen schools, ten schools were represented, by a music specialist, in the focus group.

The elementary music educators and their schools. Ten of the K-6 schools in the urban school division were represented, in a focus group, by the music specialist who

served the school population. Seventeen schools in the school division house grade six students who must make a choice regarding course options when they reach grade seven. Of the twelve student participants in the study, only one attended an elementary school that was not represented in the elementary teacher's focus group.

The teachers in the elementary music educators' focus group were asked to describe the music programme in their school. All schools represented offered their students a minimum of ninety minutes of music instruction from grades one through grade six. The kindergarten students receive 60 minutes of music instruction in each of these schools. In three of these schools, an extra period of 30 minutes per cycle was scheduled for multi-age choirs. In one school, every child from kindergarten through grade six received a timetabled choral class. In the two other schools, the choral class was for grades one to three only. From the information that the music educators gave me, most students in the division would have music three times per six day cycle, some would have music four times per cycle, and some may have music only two times per cycle, if the school chooses to offer two , forty-five minute music classes in each six day cycle. The elementary music educators in the focus group confirmed that the schools in the division employ music specialists with Orff training.

Elementary music educators' knowledge of middle years programme offerings.

There was a mix of awareness by the music educators of the programmes to which the students of the elementary music educators would move. Three of the music educators in the focus group had served long tenures in their schools (fifteen years or more) while four had served for less than four years. The long-term teachers described the band programmes in the schools that their students attend in grade seven, but could not definitively state

whether there were choral or general music programmes in those schools. Two of the elementary music educators worked in K-9 schools and had intimate knowledge of the middle years music programmes in their school, describing such things as the band programme, time-tabled choirs, extra-curricular choirs and guitar clubs. One teacher described a grade 7 and 8 arts rotation that the students in her K-8 school take, in addition to the regular band, art and drama options. Other knowledge of programmes was mixed. For instance, Ms Andrews, who had been in her elementary school two years, said,

I am not sure about choosing art or band. You know, I might have got that wrong. Maybe they can take both art and band. I don't know what that does to their timetable, but art and band are part of the curriculum in both junior highs. There might be a drama component as well. Again, I don't know if they can do band and drama ... and I don't know if they can do band and choir.

Knowledge of the grade seven programmes available to the students of these educators was not consistent. Some of the music educators were not aware of what their students potential options were generally, and specifically, they were unsure of the possibilities for music education in grade seven.

Middle years band teachers and their schools. Three of the eleven schools in the participating school division, that house middle years students, were represented in a focus group by the band teacher that served the school population. Four of the student participants who had chosen music as an option in the middle years were students of two of the band teachers in the focus group. The third participant in the focus group taught none of the students who participated in the study. At this participant's school, band is compulsory in grade seven. Of these band teachers, only one, from a middle years'

school, was male.

The three educators in the middle years focus group were from three distinctly different school settings. Mr. Findlay worked in a large suburban school with grades 7-9 only. Ms. Harris worked in a smaller, grades 5-9 school, and Ms. Norris' school houses students from kindergarten through grade 8. Mr. Findlay had three hundred students in his band classes, Ms. Harris had about one hundred and fifty students and Ms. Norris had fifty students in her band classes.

Band teachers' knowledge of elementary feeder schools. These band teachers were very aware of what was happening in the music programmes in their feeder schools. Ms. Norris worked in a K-8 school and she has

been teaching at the school for the past two years. I had an idea where they were coming from, but I know also that, like at Ms. Harris' school, I was the fifth or sixth band teacher in five or six years. In the elementary there have been two teachers, and the previous teacher was there only three years and the teacher prior to that was only there for two years..... I think that plays a part in the students' capabilities and the skill level.

Ms. Harris' situation was remarkably similar. She said

I did teach the general music programme for grades five and six for about five years ... but the last three years there have been three different teachers teaching the grade five/six music classes. I really don't have a sense of what they are coming in with, but I have noticed that the skill level is weaker.

Mr. Findlay also spoke specifically about the music programmes in the schools that feed his middle years school He said,

I have three feeder schools, three very different experiences. I could almost to a person be able to pick out which school a student comes from based on a couple of classes with them, and their attitudes towards music and their background. In two of three of my feeder schools, the elementary music specialists have been very supportive of their students continuing in band and have gone so far as to attend concerts and speak very highly of music education with their students.

Then Ms. Harris noted that, “at my feeder school, it is the teachers who just shamelessly promote the band programme, so in one of the grade six classes 100% of the students sign up for band.”

Ms. Norris knew about special projects in the elementary portion of her school that she thought encouraged children to choose music.

When our grade fives go all the time in February to perform with the symphony, that kind of pumps them up about going into band. And I took them to the University of Manitoba Wind ensemble, so they are all excited about that.

Ms. Harris, who had students enter her programme from other schools in their grade seven year, was teaching band in a 5-9 where she has

tried to be involved in the elementary music programme at our school by helping with concerts and things so that the students know me, they know who I am and I can kind of help out with some of the kids that are struggling a little bit. I help them when they are out in the hallway trying to figure out recorder work, so there is a familiarity. With our other feeder school, that contact is more difficult.

These band teachers are fully aware of the music programmes that their students come from. The elementary music educators were not, collectively, certain of the options

offered to their students in grade seven. The band teachers did know what was offered in their own buildings. Mr. Findlay told us that, “in grade seven it is band or art, in grade eight they have a third option which is a combination of graphic arts/drama. When they move to grade nine, the options are wider.” Ms. Harris said that at her school, “it has been either art or band in grade seven, and there is a further option in grade nine to take jazz inside the schedule as a credit, but now the grade nines will no longer be there.” At Ms. Norris’ small school the options are “art and band only. And the students can go from band to art, but if they want to move from art to band, they CAN but there is an expectation that they take lessons over the summer.”

These band teachers’ schools offer a variety of options which become more limited with the smaller size of the school. Just as the elementary music specialists were not fully aware of the options that were available to their students in grade seven, these band teachers were not aware of the options offered to students at other middle years schools.

After we talked about the options offered, the band teachers were asked to describe their school community and their programmes. Mr. Findlay began with a detailed description of his school population and the programmes his school offers. His school is multicultural, and generally education and music is valued in the homes.

We run enrichment home rooms where students are streamed by academic ability and we run one enrichment home room in grade seven and one in grade eight. Of those students in the enrichment classes, we generally, out of 26 or 27 students in that home room, we probably have 25 or 26 of them will be in band and remain in band throughout school. We vary in size from about 115 to maybe next year about

130 students in grade 7 band, and as we transition into grade eight we still have between 90 and 100 students in grade 8 so we retain a fairly high number of those students.

Mr. Findlay also described how other options were accommodated.

One of the things that our school has done in the past, which unfortunately will not be continuing next year, is that we have allowed students in grade seven to take art and band, and the art was a lunch time club that the students could participate in, so when I spoke with the students as grade sixes, we could tell them, you don't have to make a decision, you can elect to take band as your course, and also take art ... try them both out, and then move forward and make your decision in grade eight. Unfortunately some changes in our funding in our division have prevented that from happening, coming up this next year. I think it would have been anywhere from six to twelve students who have elected to take part in that option.

Mr. Findlay's school is more transient by nature.

We have a bit of a revolving door. We get students, throughout the year, who come in, and it is not uncommon in a year to have four or five students come to band class who are from China, or they don't speak English, and the class is eighty students, so, it is a challenge! We offer jazz band as a full credit, for 30 years the jazz band is the single biggest draw for students. That is the group that does all the fun stuff. Our choir is something completely different, it is a really different experience and there is not a connection between the band and the choir at the school. The students do receive a credit for choir in grade nine if the student

starts choir in grade seven and continues through grade nine. If they start in grade nine, they get 1/2 a credit.

Ms. Norris described a totally different school community. She said, “We are a small school of under 200 students from K-8. We have very small classes, but in my two years in the school, nineteen of twenty, and then fifteen of sixteen went into band.”

Ms. Harris, who worked in a 5-9 school, continued,

Compared with Mr. Findlay’s school, our band classes are relatively small. Some of our band students are very weak when they come, in terms of their skills. They can be weak musically. We have a jazz band that is extracurricular, and our choir, it isn’t a credit choir just because the way it works, is that you have to be in choir for a number of years, to rack up enough hours for credit, so I would call it extracurricular.

These three schools are very dissimilar, but the band teachers in them had a lot in common. They had knowledge of the music programmes in their feeder schools, they had intimate knowledge of the support their programmes received from their feeder schools, they built relationships with the younger students and their communities, they knew the options available to the grade seven students in their buildings, and they were aware of the options available to their students.

Findings

The student participants engaged in conversations with me that averaged fifty-five minutes in length. The music educators’ focus group conversation was an hour and forty-five minutes long, and the band teachers’ focus group was ninety minutes in duration.

From these conversations, themes emerged. These themes are: adjustment to grade seven,

elementary school experiences, preparation for grade seven, factors affecting choice, factors discouraging student from choosing music as an option, factors that discourage music students from other options, knowledge of the benefits of the option that the students have chosen, satisfaction with the choice the students have made, and perceptions of options. I present the findings on these themes here.

Adjustment to Grade Seven

The students who participated in this study had just finished their grade seven year at school. From all accounts, grade seven seemed to be a good start for these students in their years beyond elementary school.

For five of the six actors and artists, grade seven was either good or easy or both. Some participants had to move from room to room, but two were in a classroom in which one classroom teacher handled all the subject areas except the students' options and their gym class. Three of the students mentioned finding new friends as a good part of grade seven. All of these students indicated that their grade seven experience was not what they had expected.

Emma encapsulated much of what this group told me when she said, "It was good, like...um...learning stuff was pretty easy for me and I was hanging out with my friends and stuff. I made a whole bunch of new friends in my class." April spoke for the group when she told me that her elementary school teachers said that,

the teachers were going to be really hard on us in grade seven, and it is going to be our worst year and everything...but it was actually one of the easiest! I met lots of people and it was good!

The actors and artists, either by hearing from teachers, or through assumption, thought

that grade seven might be a difficult year. With two qualifiers, their experience proved differently. April, Deborah, Emma, Ruth and Thaddeus found their year easy, fun or good. Emma found new friends during her grade seven year. Deborah and Thaddeus found portions of it confusing, while Thaddeus found the rigours of changing schedules, and subject specific rooms a challenge.

With one exception, the musicians also described grade seven as good. There were changes from their elementary experience in that they now had different teachers for each subject, they had to travel from classroom to classroom, and, according to Melanie, there were exams that they had not had in elementary school. They found their typical day hard to describe because the timetable for each day was so different. To a student, they found their teachers in grade seven “good” or “great”, very helpful, supportive and fair. As for grade seven being a good year for the musicians, Fergus reflected the group’s position when he said,

It was good, easy, like, up until, like halfway through the year, it was all review, because apparently we forgot everything! Grade seven was a whole batch of good teachers and it was lots of fun. I enjoyed it...it was a good year overall.

Like three of the actors and artists, Brad, Fergus, Melanie, Sam and Sarah found their grade seven year good, while Fergus, Melanie and Sam also said it was fun. Fergus was the only musician who said it was easy. Brad and Fergus mentioned good teachers. Sarah not only agreed with Thaddeus and Deborah that grade seven could be confusing, she called it chaotic.

Figure 1 collects the thoughts of the actors and artists and the musicians regarding their adjustment to grade seven. Four of the actors and artist found grade seven good and

or fun, two found it initially confusing and one found it hard. One musician agreed that grade seven was easy, and five musicians simply agreed with four of the actors and artists that grade seven was good.

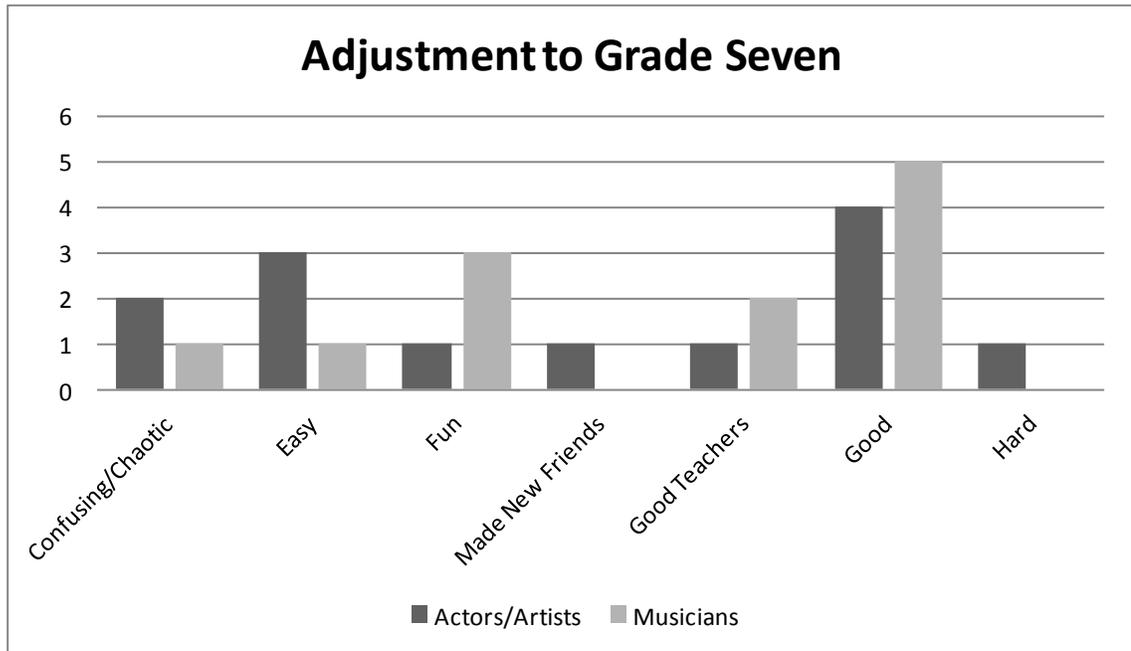


Figure 1. Comparison of student group adjustment to grade seven.

Best part of the day. The actors and artists and the musicians generally thought that grade seven was good, but there were varying opinions about what constituted the best part of their day. The actors and artists singled out teachers, the musicians talked about lunch and making new friends. A closer look at the student’s likes as far as their school day was concerned follows.

The actors and artists already credited their teachers with making their year good, but three students expanded on this thought. April, Deborah and Ruth indicated that the best part of their day was their teachers. April and Ruth actually indicated two best parts of the day, and included a subject area. April LOVED science, mostly, because of her teacher.

She was like...she was like...she wasn't like stressed out ... she helped us with whatever we needed.... like.... if she knows if people need help and she'll.... like go and talk to those people when there is ... like ... free time ... like ... she knows??? And most teachers don't to that.

Besides her teachers, Ruth said she “actually...ummm....art.....**I LOVED** art!” (emphasis is Ruth's). Ruth's option choice was one of the best parts of her day.

Teachers were not the only thing that the actors and artists enjoyed. Emma, Jenna and Thaddeus all stated that they liked lunch the most. Emma and Thaddeus both missed the recesses that they had in elementary school. For Emma, lunch was a time for “just being with my friends and a bit more freedom too, we could just go wherever and do what we wanted.” Jenna just enjoyed the time away from classes. “It's a break, you know?”

Teachers, time off and specific subjects were mentioned as the best times of the day for these actors and artists. April, Deborah and Ruth mentioned their teachers, Jenna, Emma and Thaddeus enjoyed their time away from the classroom and April (science) and Ruth (art) mentioned subject areas as being the best times of their day. It is interesting to note that for Ruth, her option choice was the best part of her day. Figure 2 depicts that good teaching and time away from it all were, for the most part, the best parts of the day for the actors and artists.

From lunch and gym, to band, ‘Atellier’ and teachers, the musicians all had varying ideas about the best part of their day. “Lunch hour was always good,” Brett said, “just eat lunch in the gym then hang out with my friends outside for an hour...a little break.” For Fergus, the best part of the day could be gym or band or his teachers. “The

teachers were fair, you know? Consistant. They all were different, but we knew how they all operated.” Brett, Carrie Sarah and Melanie also mentioned band. Melanie said, “I really liked band. My friends really liked band too ... ’cause we got to play lots of music.” Sarah went on to say that, “sometimes we didn’t have that in our schedule so....it was kind of a disappointing day.”

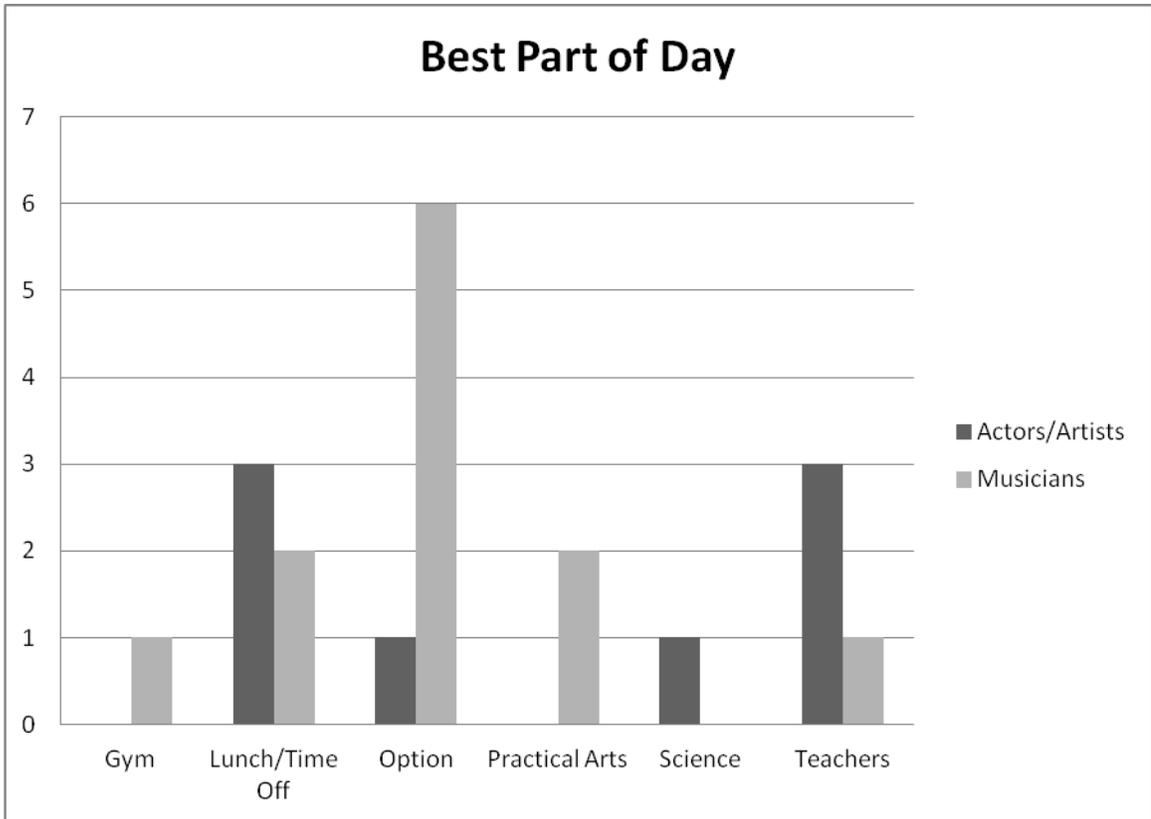


Figure 2. Comparison of student group daily school activity preferences.

Brett, Carrie, Fergus, Melanie, Sam and Sarah offered that band was the best part of their day, when they had band. It was not scheduled for every day of the cycle in any of the schools, so Sam, Sarah, Carrie and Brett reminded me that band could not be the best part of every day! Fergus and Sam really enjoyed the rotating practical arts sessions that their school offered, and Fergus also mentioned fair and consistent teachers, and gym. Brett agreed with three of the actors and artists, and really enjoyed time away from

it all.

Figure 2 clusters the statements of the students regarding the best part of their day in grade seven. One actor/artist mentioned an academic subject as the best part of their day, one musician mentioned gym as the best part of the day. Three actor/artists and one musician mentioned lunch or time off as the best part of the day. Three actor/artists and one musician credited teachers with giving the students the best part of their day. Two musicians enjoyed practical arts. In area of options, one actor/artist thought that art was the best part of the day, and all of the musicians thought that band was the best part of the day, when they had band. I was looking at the perspectives of students regarding the option choices of grade six students entering grade seven. The revelation that all of these six musicians indicated band as the best part of their day, while only one of the actor and artist group indicated their option as the best part of the day was of interest.

Worst part of the day. The students also told me about one or two parts of their school day that they were not so happy with. These included such things as bussing to school, the physical plant of the school and subject areas.

Not all of the actors and artists could find anything to say about the worst part of their school day. April and Ruth both indicated that gym was the worst time of their school day, and both indicated that the staff was part of their issue with gym time. Because there were two classrooms, one French and one English, sharing gym time, April felt school was, “mostly good, except gym,” because there

was a lot of wasted time ... like we have two teachers and then we usually play like one big game together ... and ... then ... one of the French teachers ... just gets mad at a kid ... and then they yell ... and then ... like in French, and then we

all sit down and we don't know what is going on and everything.

Ruth said, "he (referring to the Physical Education Teacher) just talks too much!" Ruth then added that, "I don't think that we have enough recess in Junior High," and "Science seemed to go on and on and on and on!" Thaddeus had a problem with Language Arts. It "wasn't my best subject ... no ... I enjoyed it ... but sometimes just ... it wasn't my favourite." Emma, Deborah and Jenna couldn't find one thing wrong with their day. Emma said, "I didn't have too many bad parts in junior high ... it was all pretty good ... yup!"

The actors and artists had a good year in grade seven. Only three of the six participants could define a 'worst part of the day' while three did not identify anything at all wrong with their days in grade seven. For April and Ruth, gym was a frustrating experience, and Ruth and Thaddeus had issues with one academic subject each. Ruth also would like a little more down time in her day. This data is clustered visually at Figure 3.

The musicians indicated a variety of dislikes in their school day. These ranged from gym, to math, to the early school start time and now having to take buses to school, unlike being able to walk to school in elementary school. Sam said, "well, I had, I um, had to take the bus, to school, because it is farther away than my other school, SO I have to wake up at, like 7:00 every morning instead of 7:25. Yeah...that's early!" The musicians waxed eloquent in their dislikes during their school day.

For the ever enthusiastic Fergus, the worst part of grade seven was the physical plant of his school and his perception of the school's organization. "So my school is falling apart! For sure!" Fergus was not impressed with the organization and upkeep of his school, and Sam also mentioned school organization, along with gym. Melanie

reminded me that exams began in grade seven, and she felt “stress” when there was an exam. The worst part of the day, for Sarah, who found too much drama amongst the girls in her new school, was a day without band. She said, “it was kind of a disappointing day,” or a day when there was a substitute for band because, “I didn’t really like having substitutes...sometimes they are... well ...not so good.”

Like Emma, Deborah and Jenna, musicians Brett and Carrie could find nothing wrong with their school days. Fergus and Sam could find issues in the organizational structure of their schools, and Fergus was disappointed with state of disrepair of the physical plant of his school. Sam did not enjoy gym and Melanie found exams stressful. Sarah found days without band, substitute teachers and the social drama surrounding her disappointing. Figure 3 shows visually the clusters of the students’ dislikes. These students did not have much that they complained about.

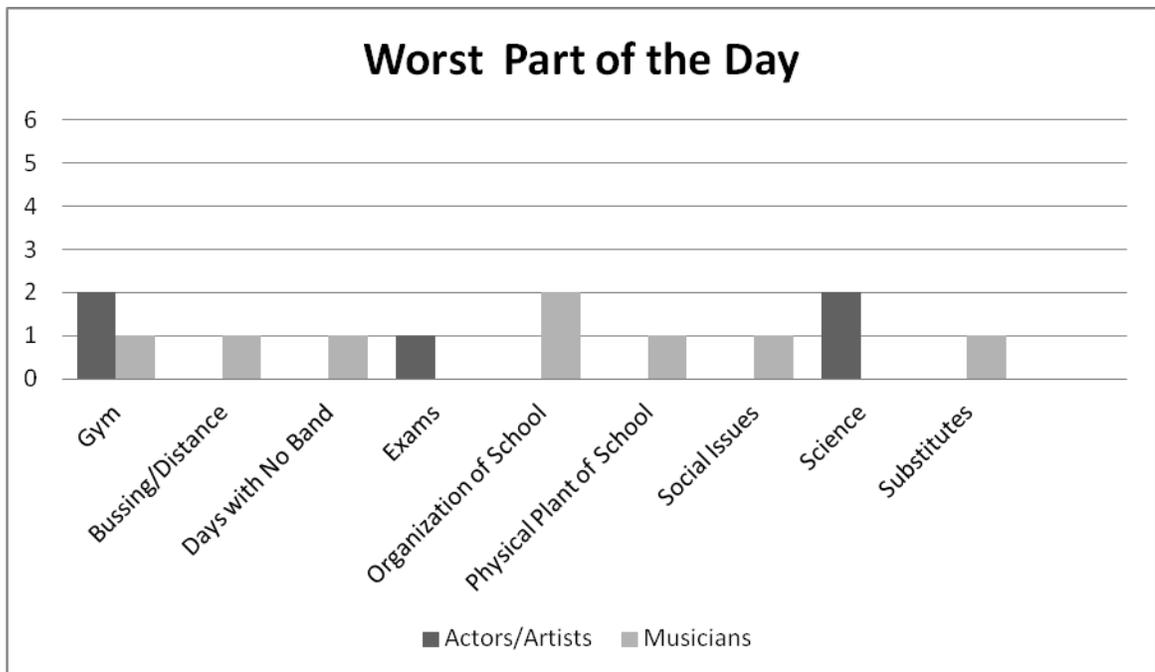


Figure 3. Comparison of student group daily school activity: dislikes.

School engagement. To determine how invested in their school life the

participants were in the life of their schools, I asked the participants what activities were available to them at school during the day, outside of class time. Although eventually both groups could articulate some of the outside activities the school offered outside the regular school day, the groups were markedly different in their immediate recall of those opportunities.

It was difficult to find out what the actors and artists knew about school life outside the classroom. When I asked the participants to “tell me about your life at school outside the classroom” five of them, initially, told me about activities that they are involved in outside of school in the community. Thaddeus was the only actor or artist who spontaneously recited all the school sports teams that he was on.

Thaddeus received the athlete of the year award for his participation in cross-country running, volleyball, basketball and track. These activities took place “before and after school ... mostly, just sports ... I don’t remember anything otherwise...no clubs at lunchtime...just practices if we needed them?” Emma finally remembered playing intramural soccer, but not on the school team. When redirected, Deborah remembered that she had, “played on the volleyball team and there were different intramurals every month ...you could just sign up when you wanted to.” With some encouragement, Emma remembered that “there were a few sports clubs that you could do before and after school and at lunch and stuff ... and there were also, like intramurals”

Even though the worst part of Ruth’s day was gym, I noticed an ‘athlete of the year’ trophy on the dining room table beside us. When I asked her about it, Ruth said, “well ... I did track and cross-country and I did volley ball and basketball ... but nothing else.” Later on in our conversation, Ruth remembered that, “one of our teachers ... at our

school ... he started a guitar club this year ... so I was in that.” Jenna was happy just walking home for lunch and after school and was not aware of extra activities at the school, nor was April.

It took prompting for this group of actors and artists to recall what was offered to them at their school outside of school hours, but when pressed, Emma, Deborah, Ruth and Thaddeus could remember participating in athletic activities and one club and also could name the availability of other activities in their school. Deborah, Ruth and Thaddeus all represented their school on athletic teams, Emma participated in intramural athletic activities that were offered and Ruth participated in an extracurricular guitar club. The actors and artists knowledge of and participation in school extracurricular activities is depicted in Figure 4.

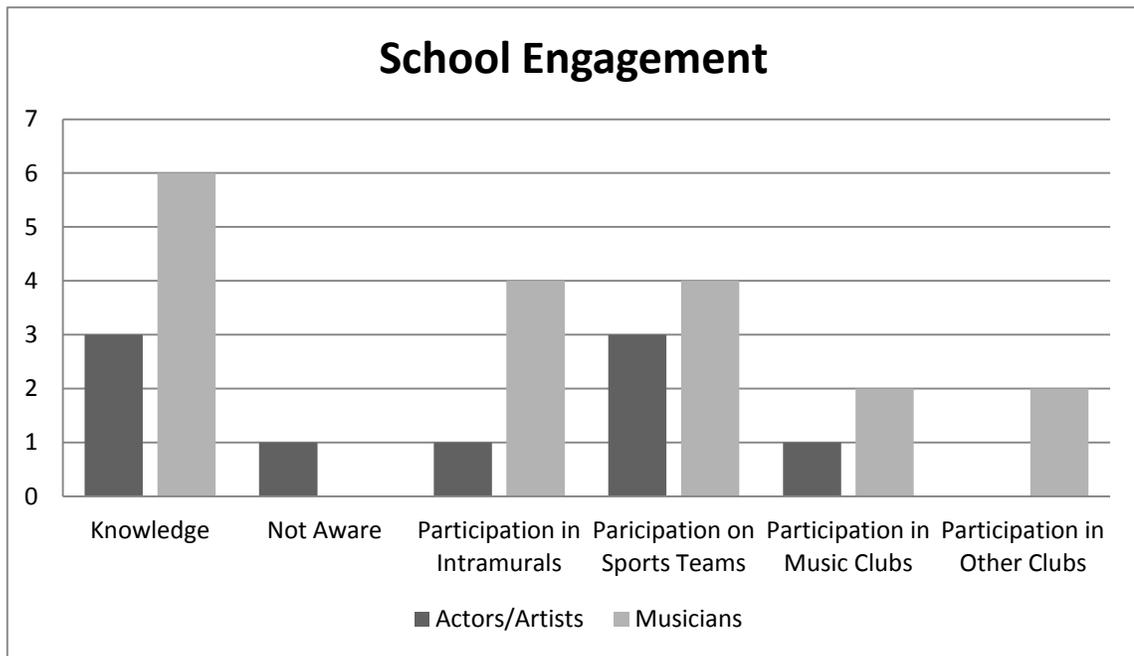


Figure 4 .Comparison of student knowledge of and participation in school activities.

The musicians described being fully engaged in school life. When asked about school life outside the classroom, each of them immediately articulated what was

available to them, at school, in terms of extracurricular activities, with no hesitation or extra prompting. Brett, Carrie, Fergus and Sarah joined in intramural sports activities either before school or at noon. Brett, Carrie, Fergus and Sarah also represented their school on athletic teams. All outlined noon hour activities such as myth busters, art club, science club, hackey sack, chess club and homework club, though according to Fergus, homework club was not popular. In his words, “it was like (the teacher) if you don’t be quiet, you’ll have to stay for homework club ... (and in response, the students) NNNOOOOOOO!” These students also told me of choirs which were either for credit or not, and jazz bands, junior and for credit. Brett was willing to attend junior jazz band at 7:45 in the morning in addition to other activities. He told me,

well, yes, we have intramurals, basketball, volleyball, badminton. Then there’s track ... everything, cross-country. We can choose to do that, or not. We are not forced into it. I also played basketball, and volleyball and half of badminton. And there’s clubs and chess club, there’s uh, yeah, there’s lots of sports mostly at our school for intramurals, and clubs ... there’s like robotics club and uh, we have like a junior jazz and in the morning, in the morning so for the sevens and eights they can sort of get a taste of what it is like in grade nine.

Sam, who isn’t much into gym, knew that

there wouldn’t be clubs, but there are special rooms that you can go into just to do different stuff, and then each, like, grade got its own room, like there was a room where you could go and play games, and there was always a room open for every one where you could go to play games, or do homework or play computer games.

Sarah joined her school’s glee club, but could not join the jazz band in her school because

she was too young. Melanie could tell me what was available, but could not participate in extra activities at school because of her commitments at home. These students were aware of the extra activities offered to them in their own particular school, and when possible, availed themselves of these opportunities.

There was a marked difference, between the two groups of participants, in the immediacy of the response to my query regarding outside of class activities. Once the actors and artists were clear on what I meant, they were able to tell me about the activities that were offered outside of class time and their involvement in them. The musicians seemed to be more in tune with what I meant in this regard and seemed to be more aware of the variety of activities offered at their schools. Figure 4 shows visually that the musicians were more knowledgeable about the availability of extracurricular activities, and were more likely to participate in those activities to a greater extent.

The outside world. There is life outside school. From their accounts, all of the students in the study participate fully in activities outside of their school experience. Their life outside school includes team sports, individual sports, lessons in the arts and community service.

The students who chose to take drama or art in grade seven were a little busier outside school than they were in school-based extra activities. The activities range from private music lessons, to playing very competitive soccer to lake time to individual sports to activities that the students spearheaded on their own.

Outside school during her grade seven year, April was the busiest of the actors and artists. She took swimming lessons, both at a city pool and at her lake, played volleyball and followed her twin brother around a lot, “cause he is like a really good

goalie!” Also through the year and continuing through the summer, April studied both guitar and piano. Emma is an accomplished soccer player, and played “for two different teams as their goalie.” From the rest of our conversation, I found that her soccer schedule did not allow for other activities. Jenna did not do school based extra-curricular activities, but she did enjoy her walk home at noon. When I asked Jenna about outside of school activities, she reminded me about her walks home, and Deborah also said that was her outside of school activity, “yeah ... usually walked home every day.” While Jenna did not seem to be fully aware of school-based activities, she had in the past, outside of school time, taken dance and drama classes, and this past year she took piano lessons and thinks that,

a big thing is practicing ... like having something that you need to do like homework ... or just practicing piano or something is something that you could do daily ... like a routine almost ... practicing the piano... so getting organized a little bit ... learning all the songs...”

Jenna and Deborah, who both liked the solitude of walking home for quiet lunches, instead of joining in school activities, had the calmest outside of school times. Jenna studied piano and Deborah did not mention any out of school time activities.

Ruth’s main activity outside school is hockey “...lots of hockey in the winter ... and this year I played it in the spring ... and then I played softball.” Thaddeus, who won the athlete of the year of the award at his school, said that he had been golfing and “working on my own art piece.”

From individual lessons, to team sports, to self-directed artwork, five of the six actors and artists participated in some sort of activity outside school. Emma and Ruth and

April participate in two team sports each, and April and Thaddeus participate in individual sports. April is included in the music lesson bar twice because she studies both guitar and piano, and Jenna studies piano. Jenna also studies dance, and Thaddeus creates art projects on his own time. Deborah was the only actor/artist who did not tell me about participation in any outside of school activities. The activity levels of the actors and artists are depicted at Figure 5.

The musicians were not only very aware of activities at school, and busy in school activities, but they indicated that they were busy outside the school walls as well. Carrie played competitive tennis, and over the summer went to a “tennis camp, and me and my Dad played in a tennis tournament and we played mixed doubles and we won!” Carrie’s family is involved with equine charitable work, and she helps with the horses when her family isn’t re-organizing family trips to the cabin to accommodate her clarinet lessons. Fergus played on a regional soccer team which involved many practices, personal training and academies, and was involved in swimming, piano and clarinet lessons and Martial Arts. Always entertaining, Fergus’ first response to my question about what kinds of things he did outside of school, was, “soccer, soccer, soccer, soccer, have soccer almost every day.” Somehow, he (and his family) fit in all the other activities as well.

All but one of the music students in the study were involved in music outside of school. Brett, Melanie and Sam were heavily involved in music outside school. Brett took piano and drum lessons and now plays drums and guitar in a “band outside of school. The rest of the guys go to a different school, but we have a lead guitar, bass guitar, drums and we sort of rotate the singing.” Melanie was beginning studies for her grade five Royal Conservatory piano studies this year, helping with care of her younger siblings as her

parents work shift work and “doing homework, yeah, lots of that!” Sam was preparing for a grade six piano exam. Both Melanie and Sam were well above their school grade level in their piano studies. Sam also rehearsed with an auditioned divisional choir, and studied at Manitoba Theatre for Young People, which cut into his piano practice time. “I haven’t had much time, I have had lots of MTYP this summer.”

Sarah was another physically active student who took dance lessons and played on soccer and volleyball teams while trying to fit in catechism. About her soccer, Sarah said, “Yeah, and soccer, is like pretty much every day of the week! It is like five days a week, so yeah, when you get into (a regional soccer organization) it is huge... a really big thing!”

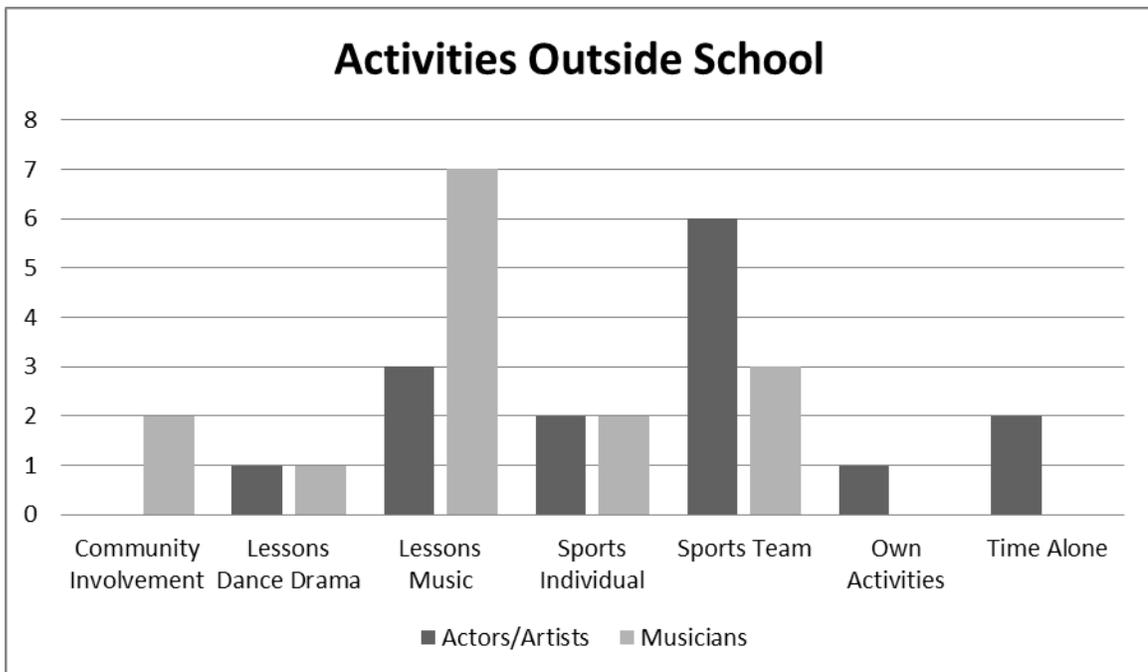


Figure 5. Comparison of student group activity level outside of school.

Carrie, and Fergus were both involved in individual sports, while Fergus and Sarah are represented on Figure 5 twice for team sports twice because they both played on two teams. Sam and Sarah took classes in drama and in dance respectively, and Sam is

included in Figure 5 for music lessons twice because of piano and choir. Brett, Carrie, Fergus and Melanie also took some sort of music lesson outside of school. Sarah, a very busy girl, was the only musician who did not study music outside of school hours, but she was also involved in catechism. Busy in extracurricular activities at school, these students were also busy in the wider community outside school. Figure 5 shows visually just how busy all of the students in this study are in their life outside school.

Because all parents of the student participants requested that I conduct the one-on-one interviews in their homes, I learned that all of the students were children in two parent households, and that all of their homes were single detached dwellings. From my conversations with them, I found that, as a group, they appeared to be happy, well adjusted students who found school a good place to be. For the most part they were engaged in school activities outside school hours and had very little to complain about. They were also involved in the community outside school. These were the similarities amongst the students. Three differences stood out regarding the research questions. Most of the students were involved in extracurricular activities offered by their schools, but the students who chose music seemed to be more fully aware of what was available to them in that regard. While only one student who chose art or drama enjoyed their option as the best part of their school day, all of the students who chose music said that band was the best part of their day. Three of the students who chose art or drama took music lessons outside of school but all six of the students who chose music also took music lessons outside of school. Two students, both from the actors and artists, took time to be alone, on their own.

Elementary School Experiences

Most of the participants in this study, though they had been out of elementary school for a full year, remembered their elementary school experiences very well. They told me about their schools, their drama opportunities, their art programmes, and what their music programmes were like in their elementary years.

The actors and artists were asked to recall their elementary school experience. Two of these students, April and Thaddeus, remembered elementary school as better than grade seven because, as April said, “I liked it because we had only, like, one teacher,” and Thaddeus remembered, because they had one teacher and stayed in their home room, that it was easier to remain organized. Ruth recalled “recess ... recess was the best part of the day ...”, but she also recalled that there was, ‘like ... there was like ... learn to play volleyball ... learn to play basketball ... like they were outside of school but attached to school.’ Emma, Deborah and Ruth needed prompting to recall anything at all and those memories were more specific

The students that chose music as an option remembered their elementary school experience. Fergus, in particular, had fond memories of his elementary school, stating it “was the best school in the history of the world. It was amazing, all the teacher were great, the technology was amazing ... !” They remembered their school day, times of bell and class schedules and the courses that they were offered in elementary school. They also remembered the physical plant, to the extent that Fergus felt compelled to say “to compare (elementary school) and (middle years school) would be like...I don’t know...comparing Bill Gates’ house and a shabby apartment block.” The students remembered elementary school generally and they also remembered the specifics of

drama, art and music in elementary school.

Drama in the elementary schools of the participants. Some of the participants students chose drama as their option for grade seven, yet none remembered having a special time in the day for drama, or a specific drama teacher, in their elementary school years. Though the students did not experience drama as a separate course of study, all had the opportunity to be in plays.

The students who chose either drama or art in grade seven recalled their elementary drama experience. April recalled plays as an extracurricular activity. Emma remembered drama as attached to music class, and “in grade four we tried out for the play... our class did, anyway ... and ... yeah ... they were usually during lunchtime ... it (drama) was outside school.” Deborah remembered that drama was extracurricular and that she, “auditioned for stuff ... like we were doing school plays ... but I never really got in.” Jenna told me that, “I didn’t have a drama teacher in elementary ... at MTYP I did ... but not at school.” “In grade five, we had a concert,” said Ruth, “in the Christmas play, I was Poppa the snowman ... and that was the only experience I have ever had ... with that kind of stuff.” Thaddeus remembered having “music about as often as gym, but no drama.”

If drama was part of these actors’ and artists’ lives in elementary school, April, Deborah, Emma and Ruth remember it as being outside the scheduled portion of their school day. April signed up to try out, but took her name off the list. Deborah signed up to audition, but remembered enjoying being in the chorus. Ruth had a speaking role in a musical. Emma remembered rehearsing for plays in her music class. Thaddeus had no memory of drama.

The students who chose music as an option in grade seven also recalled particulars of their elementary school drama experience. The students indicated that they had no timetabled drama class or specialist teacher in drama in elementary school, although Sarah, who seems fixated on ‘social interaction as drama’ stated, when asked what drama looked like in elementary school stated that, “we had drama in regular social life!” Drama in elementary school for these six students, took the form of school musicals for which there were tryouts, then outside school hour rehearsals. These school musicals were the reason Brett sang in the extracurricular choir that his elementary school offered. In Brett’s words “I didn’t really like singing. I was just waiting for grade seven to come when I could actually play an instrument ... cause you had to do choir to go into the play!”

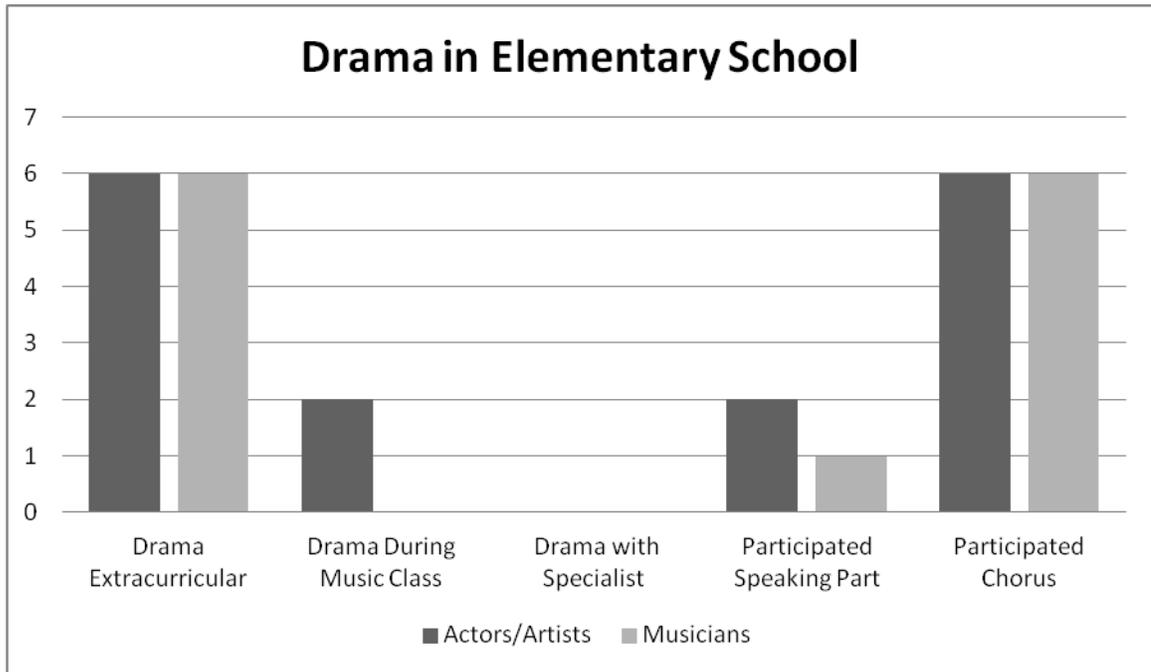


Figure 6a. Comparison of the student groups drama education experience.

The musicians knew that their drama experience in elementary school was limited. Their general recollections are collected in Figure 6a. While drama was part of

the student's social life, or part of their extracurricular life, art education was more formalized for them.

All of the students had the opportunity to be involved in a dramatic production in their elementary school years. They were either in the chorus of a musical, or they took their own time to audition and practice for speaking parts. If they were in a chorus, it might have been part of the school music curriculum or it might have been extracurricular. None had specific drama instruction during their school day. The focus group conversation with the elementary music educators confirmed this information. They indicated that in each of their schools, drama took the form of musicals, either for their school's winter concert, or for a spring event. .

Art in the elementary schools of the participants. The students' art education was a different story from their elementary drama experience. All remembered having dedicated time, if not a dedicated teacher, for art in their elementary school years.

The students who chose art or drama for grade seven recalled their elementary art experience. Emma remembered having a special teacher for art in her younger grades, then spending time with her homeroom teachers in a special time for art each week. Emma, Jenna and Deborah attended the same school, and Deborah reflected the other girls contributions to this topic when she told me that "we would have an art session, like the whole afternoon or something, with (teacher's name) our home room teacher, and with (art teacher) sometimes...she used to work at our school like an art teacher." Art classes were something that Ruth also remembered well. "At my other school...like every cycle we would have like an hour of art...and that was really good." In his elementary school experience, Thaddeus had art every 'week' (meaning once a six day

cycle) with his classroom teacher whom he identified as also being his middle years art specialist.

Specialist or no specialist, dedicated afternoon or once or twice a cycle, these actors and artists remembered their elementary art experience, and seemed to enjoy that experience. Deborah, Emma and Jenna remembered having dedicated time in their timetable for art, and for a few years or sessions at least, an art specialist. Ruth also remembered her specialist from her experience in a school in the United States. Thaddeus remembered having dedicated time for art in his elementary school experience, and one year that art experience was with his current art specialist. Only April did not comment on her elementary art experience.

Art was a scheduled class, which, for all participants who chose music for grade seven, took different forms in different schools. Brett and Melanie remembered having a dedicated art class once per cycle, with their classroom teacher as their instructor. Later in our conversation Melanie did say that her “art teacher” talked about choices of options, in grade seven, but from the surrounding conversation, it appeared that the art and classroom teacher were one and the same. Before grade six, Carrie remembered doing art projects in class with her home room teacher, once a cycle, that were all the same, but in grade six, her home room teacher was an artist who allowed for more art time in the schedule, and presented projects that all students interpreted differently. Sam and Fergus remembered having art with their classroom teachers but couldn’t be sure how often. They remembered doing theme projects, such as decorative or gift projects for Hallowe’en or Christmas. Sam had art once per cycle with his classroom teachers through elementary school. At Sarah’s school, in her younger grades, she had what she described

as a different teacher for art, who taught the students “painting, and we worked with pastels.....and we did some clay things ... then she left and we were all sad.” All of the students who chose music as an option in grade seven had had some form of timetabled art education in their elementary experience. Only Sarah remembered having a specialist art teacher.

The elementary music educators’ focus group confirmed that in their schools, the classroom teachers scheduled art into the timetable. They indicated that in six of the schools represented there was a staff member who was particularly well versed in art education and that person acted as a resource to the other teachers. Two music educators indicated that at one time or another, their schools had had art specialists. The two students who chose art as an option came from those schools. A comparison of the musicians, art experience with that of the actors and artists can be found at Figure 6b.

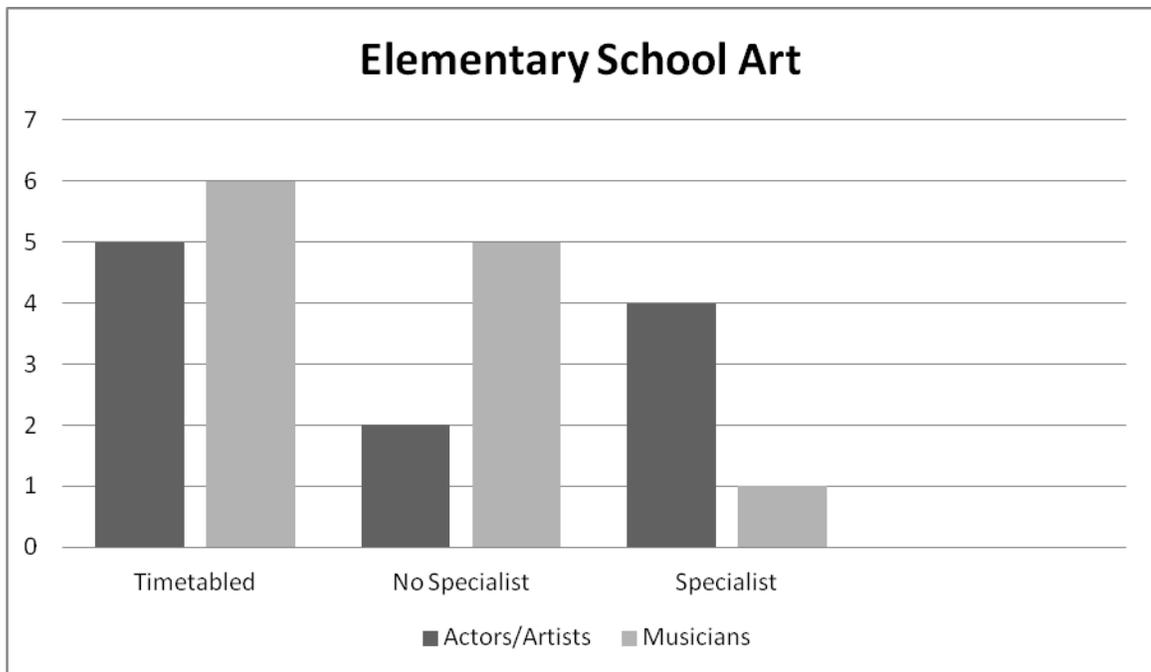


Figure 6b. Comparison of students, elementary art education experience.

Music in the elementary schools of the participants. Memories of music

education were also very clear for these students. All remembered having a specific time allotment for music, and a different teacher. They also remembered specifics of the curriculum.

The students who chose art or drama for grade seven were more than forthcoming with information on their elementary music experience. April recalled that “music was a subject and we got training in that.” Emma remembered that she “played on recorder and like soprano and alto and the ... the xylophone things.” Deborah said, “we had music, yeah ... once a day ... we played recorder and xylophones.” Deborah also remembered “watching movies...on composers ... like Bach ... and ... I found that interesting! It kind of showed their life story... things that I didn’t know.” Jenna remembered having to apply her musical skills when “we had to make like our own composition. We had to make a set of notes and we had to use a set of instruments that was in the room, and we made like a performance, and presented it in front of the class.”

Ruth, who had been in four different elementary schools, had varied elementary music experiences. She told me that, “at my other school, music was crazy. In grade four that would be recorder, we had a new principal and she was a violin player ... and she wanted to teach violin ... so ... I don’t know where that came from ... she just wanted violin so ... we ... all the grade fours started playing violin and she was supposed to be teaching us...she got rid of the music teacher and she was going to be the music teacher ... she ... and she never showed up ... there would be classes we would sit there ... for half an hour doing nothing ... sitting there waiting for her to come ... and she wouldn’t show up.” Thaddeus, who now attends school with Rachel, remembered the recorder and choir classes in his elementary school.

It (music) was more frequent than art ... I remember that art would maybe happen three days a cycle ... where music was maybe five ... it was as frequent as gym pretty much. Recorder was one of the big things that I remember ... we would go out to perform at other places in choir.

Different memories, different experience, but all the participants in the study said that they had dedicated music time with a teacher who taught only music, a 'specialist' in their elementary schools. Each of the schools that these students attended had had changes in the specialists during the students' time at the school and Ruth had had several teachers in her elementary music experience. Deborah, Emma, Ruth and Thaddeus remembered lots of recorder, Emma, Ruth and Thaddeus remembered a choral component, Emma and Deborah remembered playing xylophones, and April and Deborah remembered a drama component. Deborah and Jenna both remembered learning about composers and April reiterated her difficulty with learning in a group situation. Thaddeus found that music classes felt too structured for him to nurture his creative side. Figure 6c helps to portray the elementary music experience of the actors and artists.

The elementary educators confirmed that the schools that April, Deborah, Emma, and Jenna attended had had a succession of specialists due to an incumbent teacher's illnesses and subsequent retirement. It was also confirmed that Thaddeus had had three different music specialists in his elementary experience. Ruth's variety of elementary music specialists was due to her several moves.

The musicians also recalled their elementary music experience clearly. In addition to their art education, all of these students had dedicated music education in their elementary schools. They did not remember exactly how many periods a cycle they had,

but they clearly remembered what they did in the classes they did have. Brett and Melanie remembered singing and playing, as Brett said, “percussion there, mostly percussion, like xylophones and things,” and as Melanie remembered, we “used recorder to learn all the notes.” Carrie remembered music class as being really “focused, you played recorder, you played xylophone and just tons of different instruments.” Fergus remembered working on “a little bit of musicality....the recorder.... songs... it was a very good basic music foundation, that is how people like to describe it”. Sarah recalled “learning the notes, and, like, playing recorder and learning how to do instruments, what the instruments are and we got to learn, like, rhythms and stuff”. Sam also played recorder, sang and played other instruments in his elementary music classes, but he also told me that on

one day a week, day six, the class became violin class. And we actually learned violin at my old school and, uh, we started in grade three, and then we learned more complicated stuff until grade six when actually, um, I remember in grade six when we, uh, had a violin club at the school and with that we got to go and play with the symphony for their concert thing with kids.

Brett, Fergus, Melanie, and Sam all attended schools where the elementary school specialists were long standing members of the school faculty. Carrie and Sarah attended schools where the music specialist had either changed or had frequent long-term absences due to illness. Carrie, Fergus, Melanie, Sarah and Sam remembered playing recorder and Brett, Carrie, Sarah and Sam remembered playing pitched percussion instruments. Brett, Fergus, Sam and Sarah remembered singing in class or in choirs outside of class time. The conversation with the elementary music educators confirmed that in the recollections

of the students' elementary school music experience. Five of the musicians talked about acquiring skills. Only Brett did not spontaneously mention acquiring musical skills.

Of three options presented to the students for grade seven, it seems that for these students, their elementary school situations gave the most attention to their music education. The graph illustrating the participants' memories of elementary music experience can be found at Figure 6c.

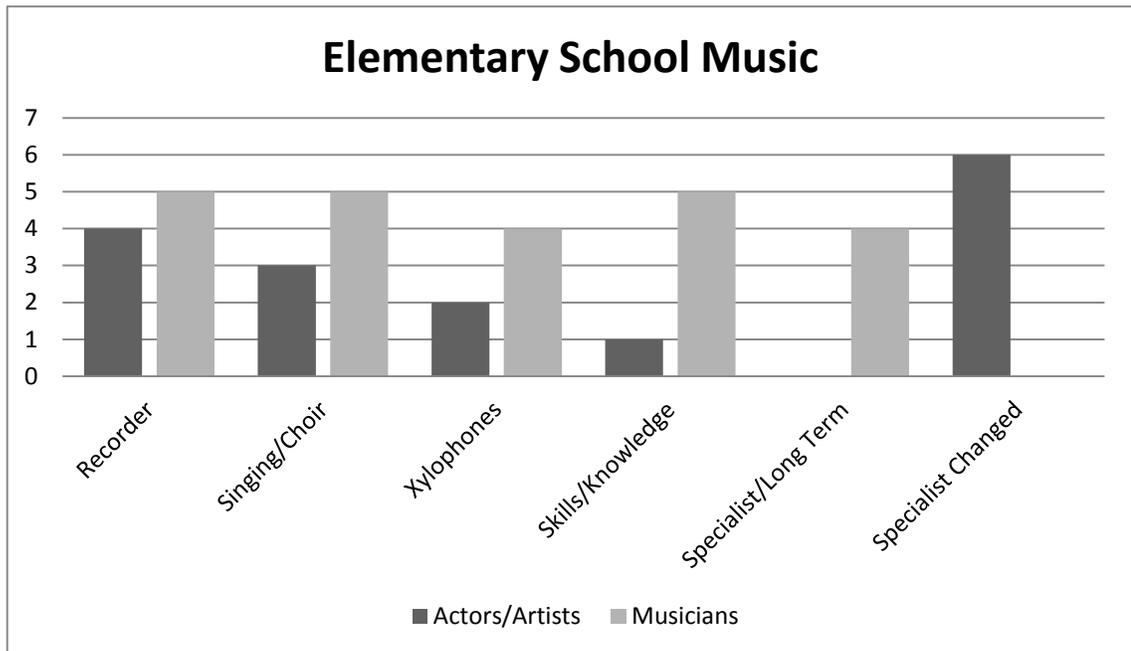


Figure 6c. Comparison of student group elementary school music experience.

The elementary music educators in the focus group confirmed that the schools in the division employ music specialists with Orff training. The students' recollections of playing percussion instruments or xylophones, and recorder and singing were confirmed as elementary school music experience by the music educators. The shared elementary music experience of the two student groups included dedicated time in the timetable for music education and the approach to music education. The only discernible discrepancy between the information from the student participants and the music educators is around

the time allotment for music in the elementary school. Some of the student participants thought that they had music every day in elementary school. From the information that the music educators gave me, most students in the division would have music three times per six day cycle, some would have music four times per cycle, and some may have music only two times per cycle, if the school chooses to offer two, forty-five minute music classes in each six day cycle.

There was one notable difference in the two student groups' experience. This difference was confirmed by information from both of the focus group. All six of the students who chose art or drama had had multiple changes in music education personnel during their time in elementary school. Only two of the students who chose music had had such changes.

Preparation for Grade Seven

The information that I received from the participants indicated to me that the transition for students from grade six to grade seven varied from school to school and student to student. Some students remain in the same building with familiar teachers for their grade seven year. Some have only one school to choose from for their grade seven year, some have a choice of three schools. The participants were asked what information they received about their new schools, or their new grade during their grade six year.

All of the actors and artists were asked to share with me what information they received regarding their transition from grade six to grade seven. Responses to my request for recollections regarding information about grade seven were not easily forthcoming in this group.

It wasn't until I asked April how information regarding options for junior high

could be improved for students in grade six, and I told her that students from other schools had had tours of their prospective schools, that she remembered that her class had been invited to one of the middle years schools for a tour. When pressed, April had vivid memories of a tour of her prospective school, while Emma, Deborah and Jenna did not refer to a tour at all. Rachel and Thaddeus moved from grade six to grade seven in the same building, therefore a tour of that school was not necessary. Neither remembered the opportunity to go to see other schools available to them in their school division.

If a tour of the new school was available to the actors and artists, with the exception of April, they did not recall that. What they did recall about receiving information about grade seven was as varied as the students themselves. April told me that “everybody knew that there had to have been music or something and everybody knew that there had to be art ... like ... but nobody knew that there was gonna be like ... three choices ... like even drama.” When I asked April how she DID find out about drama, she told me about the tour of the school as mentioned above. Emma’s first recollection of hearing about options was at recess from her friends. She thought that her grade six home room teacher might have mentioned something. When I asked her specifically if her homeroom teacher might have talked about grade seven, or given her some information, Deborah said “No, not at all,” but she did remember that “we were given a ‘form’ ... I remember ... I remember the band teacher came and we got to try instruments at school.” Jenna remembered that the home room “teachers talked about it a little bit at the end of grade six.” Jenna also stated, “the first time I heard that there were three options...in grade seven ...was from my sister.” Ruth, who was enrolled in a K-9 school, remembered that

we had a day in grade six when we went into the band room for an hour ... and there were a couple of people that came from, like, music instrument stores ... and they brought a bunch of instruments and the, like ... for us to try them ... to see what works and stuff??? (The band teacher) came and he talked to us ... like he would say like this is going to happen ... and then he told us what we need to think about when we are choosing stuff ... and the ... I think (the guidance counselor) talked to us a couple of times.

Thaddeus, who is also enrolled in a K-9 setting, remembered his elementary music educator and his home room teacher speaking to the class about their grade seven choices.

The actors and artists indicated several sources of information regarding grade seven, and its options. These sources included peers or friends, siblings, a guidance counselor, an elementary music teacher and homeroom teachers. Some remembered receiving forms, but some who did receive forms could not necessarily remember who might have given them the form. These grade seven actors and artists received information about their course options from a variety of sources, and through a variety of means of delivery. A visual depiction of this information is found at Figure 7 (see p. 125).

After we had discussed their general experience in grade seven, and what they could remember of their elementary school experience, the musicians and I moved toward a discussion of the transition from grade six to grade seven, and the preparation the students received for that transition. In particular, we discussed the information that they received regarding their options for junior high. There were varying responses to this

question.

For some of the music students in the study, the information process about grade seven began with a tour of the new school. When Melanie and Brett recalled the information process during the spring of grade six they both remembered having tours of both the schools that their elementary school fed into. They did not remember specific information being given to them or spending time in the art room at either of the schools, but they did remember the band rooms, and Brett did not compare the rooms favourably. One was small and full of instruments “on the floor ... everywhere!” while the other was spacious “with a stand for every chair.” Sam also had a tour of the school he would attend, where they spent an hour in the art room making a project, and in the computer room doing photo shop, and another hour in the home economics lab making a lunch bag, but where he did not see the band room because there was a class in process. Sarah had what she described as a “disappointing tour.” The students from her elementary school met in the band room of the middle school, listened to a speech about bullying at the school, then were set free to explore the school. She said, “We were LOST!!” (Sarah’s exclamation) Fergus and Carrie did not need a tour of the middle school. Their grade six year was spent in the same building they would attend during grade seven.

When asked specifically how they first heard about their optional courses for grade seven, each student took a while to collect their thoughts. Brett “knew in grade three cause my brother was four years older and ... got to make a decision.” Fergus also remembers knowing from ‘older kids’ that there would be choices and he recalls that his classroom teacher said that the students could choose band or art, but, “we knew that you could choose band or art from grade five ... cause the older kids told us.” Carrie

remembered that “our grade six teacher ... like ... she told us our options and stuff” and also remembered her classroom teacher saying “that it would be band or art and saying about how you get stuck in art or you can go in band and switch.” At Melanie’s school, the classroom teacher “told me we would have choices and that we would make our own choices.” “I remember I was told how junior high would work, like throughout the (grade six) year,” said Sam, “And near the end of the year our teacher gave us a paper that had band and art and we had to put a check mark and she said it had to be back the next day.” When asked specifically if her grade six, classroom teacher, told the students what the choice would be, Melanie thought not.

Some students recalled receiving a form but none could articulate if this was a registration form or simply information about grade seven. Carrie’s form came from her principal. Sarah said, “...weeeellll, they gave us a paper describing what it was like, so they told us what you would be doing ...” Sam remembered his grade six teacher

“just saying things aren’t going to be this easy in junior high and stuff ... and then um ... she didn’t actually say much about the note when she gave it to us. Like she didn’t even say ... she didn’t talk about much about the choices, she just said choose one and then hand it back to me tomorrow.”

Fergus thought that perhaps he got a form from the band teacher in his middle years school, but then wondered “or maybe I got it from my teacher ... I brought it home” but later confirmed that he got it from his home room teacher and said

“it was sort of like ... we are done grade six music ... we are done grade six art ... here are the sheets ... you can choose band, you can choose art ... good bye, and then they beat us to the door!”

The forms seemed to come at different times and in differing ways to these students.

Five of the six students who chose music as an option remember classroom teachers speaking briefly about their choices, and receiving forms. None of these students who chose music as an option could remember an elementary school guidance counselor, or principal having made a presentation on grade seven and its opportunities and possibilities. Only Melanie recalled that other staff spoke with the students about their grade seven options. Melanie said that “we talked with my music teacher...she talked about band and about the teachers and about what you did and helped me with my decision and my art teacher didn’t really talk about it. He said there was a choice of art, but that is all.”

While the information from the class room teacher was presented differently for each of these students, and the understanding of the timing and presentation of the forms was not uniform across the students, what each participant who chose music could remember was having a presentation on the music option in grade seven by the band teacher in the school that they would eventually attend for grade seven. Brett and Melanie remembered the band teacher from one of their possible middle years schools coming to one of their music classes and Brett recalls,

he came to one of our music classes and said ... well, he brought his instruments and we got to try them. We got to test out the instruments ... so it wasn’t just like random choice ... he ... we actually got to try the instrument to see if you like it or not.

Carrie remembered that her grade six class went to the band room in her K-9 school on a couple of occasions and the band teacher,

explained, and told us what we would be able to do in band and also have, like, before everyone got to pick they brought in tons of instruments that we would play and then we got to try them out and see if we could get a sound.

Sarah remembered a visit to her grade six classroom by the band teacher who also brought instruments, and Sam knew that there had been a visit by a band teacher to his school, but he was away on a choir tour, so was not sure what that visit was like. Because the music room in Fergus' school is right across from the band room, Fergus said the band teacher, besides explaining instruments at assemblies in the school, visited the grades five and six music room regularly to help with recorder and other instrument playing. The band teachers in the division made an effort to visit with their potential constituents. None of the students recalled being given information specifically regarding art or drama programme in grade seven.

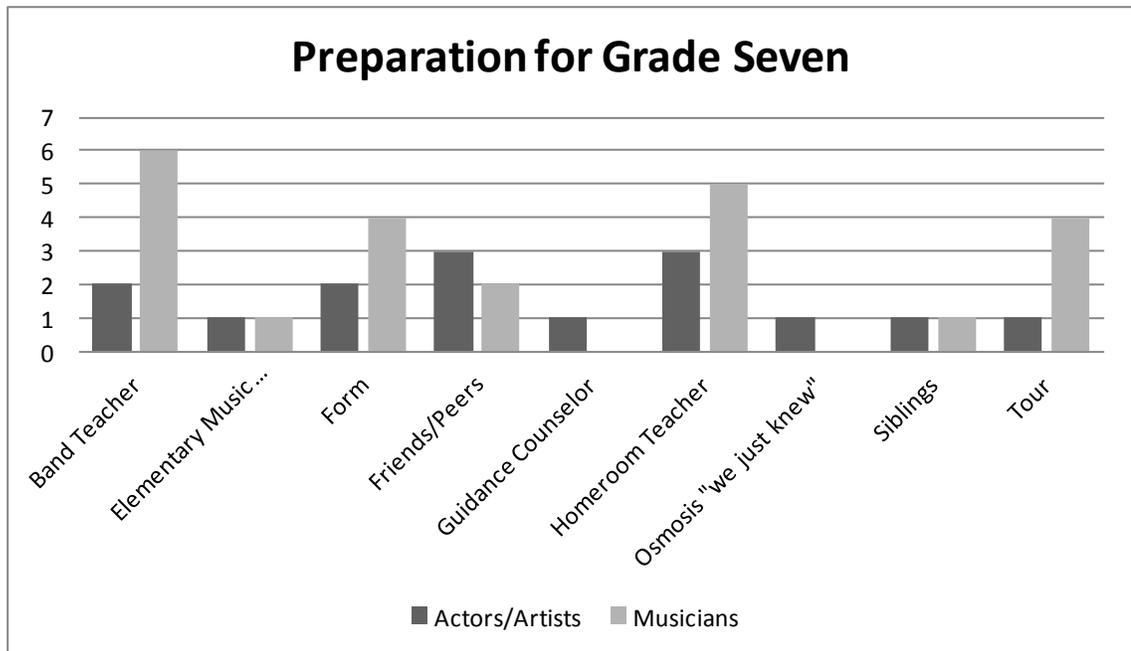


Figure 7. Comparison of information sources for options in grade seven.

These grade seven music students received information about their course options

from classroom teachers, elementary music educators, siblings and older friends. All but Sam experienced having a visit from the middle years band teacher and those who had to change schools for grade seven participated in tours of their new school. Only Carrie, Melanie and Sam had vivid memories of a homeroom teacher in grade six informing the students of the choices for grade seven. Figure 7 depicts the grade six students' memories of where they received their information for grade seven options.

The preparation of these students for grade seven seemed to me to be haphazard. The one constant for both groups seemed to be a visit from or with the middle years music educator who at some point exposed the grade six students to instrument possibilities, and explained to the grade six students what music in the middle years entailed. This was confirmed by both focus groups. The middle years band teachers all indicated how important it was to them to make contact with the music educators in their feeder schools and to set up information sessions for the grade six students. The elementary music educators were well aware that their students received much information regarding the middle years music programme, but indicated that there seemed to be no clear or consistent plan for the delivery of all information regarding school after grade six to the students.

The fact that students who attend feeder schools are well educated about their band opportunities was driven home by the band teachers. These band teachers worked hard to inform not only the grade six students, but also their parents, about the music option for grade seven. The approaches ranged from using newsletters to inform parents to concerts in the feeder schools, to the band teacher being present at elementary school productions to helping with elementary students with their recorder work and Christmas

Concerts.

The band teachers who attended the focus group spoke at length about the importance of keeping parents informed about music education and what is happening in the band teacher's school. Mr. Findlay said,

I am aware of the fact that the students have to choose between band and art, so if parents bring the question up about the choice, I discuss it with them but I am very careful, you know, of not wanting to step on the toes of any other teachers in the building. I think I have to behave very professionally and carefully about the benefits about what it is that we do in our programme, and the benefits of playing a instrument in a band and the unique benefits of playing music in a band.

Ms. Harris added,

I go so far as to point out, when a child is really struggling, with the choice, because they love art and they want to take band...I point out that it is not possible to get a band experience outside the school system, so I do have a student who is an excellent artist, and also wanted to continue in the band, and that student is taking art outside of school so he could continue in band. Casual conversations with students and parents on barbeque nights and open houses are very important.

Ms. Norris worked part time in two schools, and did not have the consistent contact she would have preferred with parents but,

because it is a K-8 school, I do contribute articles to the school newsletter. And when I sent out the information packet for band, the first page or so lists the benefits of being in band and why it is important, and what their child will get out

of band. It explains credits and options like jazz band.

This idea brought Ms. Harris to say,

When I give out my information there is always, definitely a sheet promoting the benefits of band, there is a first page that outlines the benefits of being in the band, what it can do for you. BUT, I think we have to be a little careful of this, because the recent advocacy materials that claimed that music made you smarter, I don't agree with that, I think that is rather....I think we have to be up front about the fact that it is going to be work, that is it is not going to be a romp in the park.

These band teachers did try to give information to parents in formal and informal venues. Like Ms. Carter, they expressed that they were cautious about how they presented the material and how they spoke with parents so as to share accurate information and to not create unrealistic expectations.

Both the student participants and the elementary music specialists mentioned school tours as a means of educating the students as to their choices for grade seven. Though not always involved in the planning, or able to be one of the 'stops on the tour', the band teachers were intimately aware of these tours. Ms. Harris said, "we bring them in, we have a grade six day every year, and the kids can go around and do different activities. They get a tour and lunch." Mr. Findlay said that ,

we do a similar thing, where a class comes to the school, but the band basically has no involvement, because we have been out to the schools already and have had a talk with them. When they do come, I know that they have about a 20 minute slot where they visit the art classroom and do a project and so that , I think, is their connection with the art programme, and it is that one contact as far

as I know.

Ms. Norris is at a K-8 school and she was not aware of her school hosting a tour. When asked if some of her other neighbourhood schools, such as the French Immersion school which is just down the block, ever came for a visit, she replied, “I never thought of that.”

The elementary music educators and the student participants spoke of the inconsistencies in the availability of tours of middle years schools for their students. There are some elementary students who could, in the school division in which the study took place, quite easily attend one of four middle years schools where bussing would be no further nor any more complex than it is for Sam, yet, from the information I received, the schools do not organize tours for all available schools. The participants from K-9 schools did not tell me that they had had tours of other schools. Only Ms. Baker and Ms. Stark said that their students visited two middle years schools.

Even in her own K-8 school, Ms. Norris noticed that some kind of outreach to the younger students was important to keeping the elementary students informed of their choices. She told us that she, “actually had one student who was originally going into art, but after having seen a concert that the grade seven and grade eights put on, he decided to take band.” Mr. Findlay expanded on the theme of outreach. He said,

The recruiting process, I think, is the most important thing that I do every single year, because the success of my programme and the things that I am able to do in that programme are entirely dependent upon bringing those students from grade six into the band in grade seven, and so, I work really hard to make sure that they understand the value, and the value of continuing in music education and present the programme in a very positive way. If we can get them in the room, we can

work on them continuing on!

Mr. Findlay's process and procedure for recruiting is thorough. He takes his older bands to each of his feeder schools where they perform

popular themes that the younger students can connect with. We'll do demonstrations on the instruments that the students can play in grade seven, and allow the younger students to try out two or three instruments, and the entire purpose is to raise some excitement about band and get them familiar with some of the instruments. Our school holds an open house, and I always ensure that we have our jazz ensemble play at that so that the parents have an opportunity to hear what our students are doing in our band programme. If you wait too long, they don't have all the information when they get their registration package.

Ms. Harris does feeder school concerts sporadically and has her band available to play at her own school's open house for prospective families, and she does a

demonstration, but it is more about science, and about acoustics. And I play 'God Save the Queen' on one breath on the recorder, just a little party trick, to get them excited and interested, and just put a few ideas in their heads about why and how what kind of effort is going to be required and they all hear the band in the band room, because it is right across from the music room.

For these band teachers, contact with the parents is as important as is contact with the students.

With the exception of Sam, all of the participants in the study told me about visits from the band teacher at their feeder school, whether it was a concert or a visit to their classroom. They also talked about trying mouthpieces and getting sounds out of

instruments. This visit by the band teacher seemed to make an impression. Sam attended the school where Ms. Harris visited sporadically. He did notice that his school did not get a tour. Ms. Andrews, Ms. Baker and Ms. Stark all noted how important these visits were, and Ms. Warner lamented the fact that (the former band teacher) was no longer at the school to which her students go after grade six. Ms. Lerner who, like Ms. Norris, is in a K-9 school also said how important it is for the younger children to hear the band, to see the programme in action.

The try-out aspect of getting the information out to grade sixes about the band programme took different forms for all three schools. Ms. Norris did say how important the instrument try-out is in the information process is. She said,

often they change their mind about whether they want to be in music or art when they come to instrument tryout night. Sometimes if they are on the fence and I say you are welcome to try an instrument, that will be the thing that convinces them to come along.

Mr. Findlay and Ms. Harris have instrument tryout nights early in September. Their schools experience changes in registration over the summer, so the process is more efficient in the fall. However, most the participants that I talked to had instrument tryouts that coincided with the band teachers visit to the elementary school in the spring. Regardless of timing, trying out of mouthpieces and instruments seemed to be a consistent information source for the students in grade six.

It seemed to me that these band teachers were already doing as much as they could to give grade six students the information and encouragement they needed to make an intelligent choice around music as an option for grade seven. Then Ms. Norris said,

I try to go to the students' recitals or other activities, and I help them with juries, and go to their rehearsals for their music lessons. Not only does this help me to connect with my students, it can also give me the opportunity to chat with their parents.

Already working full time, with a busy extra-curricular schedule that included a choir and jazz band, Ms. Harris offered that she had

tried to be involved in the elementary music programme at our school by helping with concerts and things so that the students know me, they know who I am and I can kind of help out with some of the kids that are struggling a little bit. I help them when they are out in the hallway trying to figure out recorder work, so there is a familiarity. With our other feeder school, that contact is more hit and miss, but I do try to visit in the spring, and perhaps attend a concert or some other school function.

Mr. Findlay also went the extra mile. He tried

to attend my feeder school performances as much as I can get out to ... and just to be visible in the schools and in the community ... for example ... I went to the musical that one of the schools did ... last spring and was able to have a couple of conversations with families whose children I currently teach or have taught, and those families, I know, spread the word.

In our chat, Fergus had spoken about a band teacher who had helped with Christmas concerts and recorder fingering. It was Ms. Harris. Brett and Melanie both noticed, as did Ms. Baker and Ms. Stark, the supportive presence of Mr. Findlay. These band teachers became significant adults to grade six students.

These band teachers visit with parents, send newsletters home and provide entertainment for open houses. They organize school visits, and concerts for their feeder schools. They attend elementary school productions and concerts, and even help with elementary student skill development when they are in the same building. These three band teachers work hard to make themselves, and their programmes, visible.

The elementary music educators acknowledged that, while they knew that band was an option for their students in grade seven, they did not know if there might be a choral option, or a general music option available to their students. They were also not fully aware of options outside of the band programme. Only the two elementary music educators who worked in K-8 or K-9 settings had intimate knowledge of the options available to grade six students. The three band teachers in the focus group were fully aware of the options in their schools, but did not, in their visits to the schools, make the grade six students aware of their other options. They also indicated that they were not able to fully apprise grade six students of options in other middle years buildings.

From the information the participants shared with me, students in this school division are well informed by band teachers, with support from the elementary music educators, about their band option in grade seven. This information is delivered in a deliberate and well planned fashion. The other options are not treated in the same way.

Factors Affecting Choice

Two of the research questions for this study were; what factors encourage students to continue in music in grade seven, and what factors discourage students from participating in music in grade seven. After having learned about the students themselves and their school experience, I began to discern what some of those factors might be.

The actors and artists in the study named several factors that affected their choice of option for grade seven. These included the decision being made unilaterally by parents, parental support for their choice, support and encouragement from siblings for their choice, encouragement from friends and self-knowledge of the actors and artists themselves. Also a factor for some was the fact that they were taking some type of music lesson outside of school, leaving them free to choose art or drama in school. When asked how and why they made their decision, the factors acknowledged by the musicians as reasons for choosing band included parents, friends, knowledge of the subject area, and passion.

Parents and family as a factor in making the choice. Two of the actors and artists named parents or siblings as factors that affected their choice of option. Five of the musicians mentioned parents or siblings as factors in their choice making.

Deborah knew that music would not be her choice, but it was her parents who insisted that she choose drama. “I wanted to do art ... but my parents ... said it would help me along the way a lot more if I did drama, so I kind of had to do drama.” Jenna also found that family was a factor in her choice. She said, “I was thinking about it (drama) because I got a little bit of influence from my sister ‘cause she took drama in grade seven, and, well, my parents were just supportive of what I chose.” Deborah’s parents insisted on drama, Jenna’s parents were supportive of her choice of following in her sisters’ footsteps.

Five of the six students who chose music as an option mentioned their parents and/or their siblings when I asked how they made their choice. Brett remembered that he knew about course options because his brother took music in grade seven. Carrie

remembered that, when she had a conversation with her parents,

“I told them that I wanted to do band and they liked that, that I wanted to do that ... we are a musical family ... my Dad played instruments when he was younger and then like (my brother) and (my sister) play the piano ... and I am playing the sax and the clarinet.

When Fergus discussed the forms with his parents, “they thought it would be better for me to choose band.” Melanie said, “I got help from my parents because I wasn’t sure if I should pick band or art ... they thought because of my piano, I should go into band.”

Sarah also discussed the options with her parents who “thought it was a good idea ... they didn’t object or anything. If I had chosen drama or art, I think that they probably would have said ‘Why aren’t you doing Music? You really like music’ and stuff.” Sam, who is studying for a grade six piano exam and who sings in his divisional auditioned choir, also included his parents in the decision making.

We (my parents and I) chatted about it (the choice) a little but it wasn’t really a hard decision because I think I knew like at the beginning of the year (grade six) that I was going to choose band ‘cause music is actually a big part of my life? Seeing that my Mom is a music teacher. And it’s just been a big part of my life.

Five of the students mentioned parents as a factor. Only Brett did not discuss the role of his parents in his decision, but he did mention that his older siblings had chosen music.

The elementary music educators discussed parental and family influence at length. Ms. Stark began the conversation by saying, “the choice is very much influenced by what the parents consider to be important and valued,” and the rest of the group agreed. The band educators agree so strongly that parents influence the choice of option

that the three members of the focus group make conscious efforts to meet with and keep in touch with parents of grade six students, keep parents of grade six students informed of the band programme for which their children are eligible, and include information on the band programme for parent information nights

As the course of interviews progressed, some of the participants who had chosen music for grade seven also mentioned friends as a factor in the decision-making.

Friends as a factor in making the choice. Four students, who chose either drama or art, for grade seven, mentioned friends when they expressed their thoughts around their own decision-making regarding their options. All six of the students who chose music as their option mentioned friends as a factor in their choice, but it was in a different context than that of the actors and artists.

Two of the students who chose art or drama said their friends swayed them toward a choice. Emma, who chose to go into drama, stated that

well, actually, I just went with what my friends did ... cause like, that is the kids I would know that I would stick around with so ... um ... I decided that I could make new friends and see if they were in art and ... like ... have other classes with them, and then I could go into art and what I really want to do after.

Even though “my Mom told me that I should go into art, and do what I am good at, and what I like, and stuff,” Emma re-stated that “I took drama anyway, to be with my friends.” Jenna was also interested in drama or art as opposed to music and said, “it is also a BIG influence from your friends... if your friends are going into drama ... so I went into drama from influence from my sister and my friends.” The peer group appeared to bear weight with these two students.

The influence of friends affected Ruth differently. She stated that her thought processes included that “maybe I will do something just for me ... a time to get away from my friends ... just ... just, be me ... and so ... I ... like OK well ... I have always liked art, so I took art!” Thaddeus was cognizant of the influence of friends and remembered, “I was kind of talking with my friends to see what they were thinking of doing, but I don’t think that the choice of my friends really influenced me ... because (his best friend) is in band and I am in art.” April said, after being asked if she had discussed the options with other students, said, “well, I didn’t really have any friends ... I think there was one person that asked me to ... like ... go into band ... but I refused.” Contradicting herself about the friend situation, April did demonstrate consistency in her decision making when she said, later in our interview,

my friends encouraged me to do art ... cause almost all my friends did art??? And I wanted to do art ... but like ... I wanted to do art because my family is really artistic ... and everything ... and they like paint and everything but I knew that I wanted to do drama because I wanted to get over, like, my fear???

Emma and Jenna acknowledged that the presence and encouragement of friends factored into their choice TO take an option, Ruth suggested that her choice of option gave her time away from her friends, and April did not go along with her friends either to music or art. Like Ruth, Thaddeus chose art when his friend did not. The complex influence of friends on decision-making is depicted at Figure 8 (see p. 148).

The musicians were also cognizant that their friends were part of their decision making. Brett, Carrie, Fergus, Melanie and Sarah remembered talking about their grade seven options with friends. Melanie and Sarah, along with Sam had an interesting take on

the role that friends play in decision-making.

While Brett did not mention that he discussed his options with his parents, he did talk with his friends about the choices. He recalled

In grade six everyone was really excited about grade seven because ... just ... oh ... everything ... and everybody would go ... everyone is like ... what are you going to do in grade seven?? Are you going to do band or art, and then the majority was band over art ... I can say that ... we pretty much stuck as a group. All my friends wanted to do band.

Later in our conversation, Brett added,

If I could guess, I think that a lot of people just follow what their friends are doing ... not what they really wanted to do ... um ... but I knew that I wanted to follow my friends but also ... at the same time ... like what I was doing.

While not having indicated that she personally discussed the issue with her friends, Carrie stated, “so that is mostly what everyone did in our class, like almost everyone went in to band except like four or five people ... they were pretty sure that they wanted to do art.” She knew what her friends had chosen. When Fergus thought about making the choice he said,

they (my parents) thought it would be better for me to choose band although all my friends were choosing band as well ... and that was definitely a factor. For kids, if all their friends are doing one thing ... and they were not entirely sure, they would go with their friends.

In the cases of Brett, Carrie and Fergus, the friend factor seemed to be a support, part of the group mentality. For Sarah, Melanie and Sam, their personal affect of the influence

was different. Sarah was included in talks with her friends.

I talked to my friends about what they chose ... and two of my friends went into drama and then one of my friends went into band with me, but she wasn't in my class ... I think it is good to know what your friends are doing but I probably wouldn't have changed my answer if they went somewhere else, I would say band because that is **MY** choice ... yeah. (Sarah's emphasis)

Melanie also indicated that she had discussed it with friends by saying, "yeah ... well, me and my friends ... um ... some of us wanted to take band but some wanted to take art ... um ... and I just wanted to take band because music was really fun." From our conversation it appeared that Sam got into some deep discussions with friends because he was able to state,

I think some of my friends, uh, because there were only two choices, they ... I think there were two kinds of people who chose band? There were people who really wanted to choose band? And there were people who **didn't** want to choose art. (Sam's emphasis)

Like Melanie, Sarah made her own choice separate from her friends, and Sam indicated some of the deeper issues of choice. When I asked him if there had been a third option for those students who chose band because it wasn't art, might they have chosen the third option instead, he nodded in agreement. A graph depicting the factors affecting the choice of option for students is at Figure 8 (see p. 148).

All six music students did make mention of friends, or as the adults call them peers, when they discussed factors affecting their choice of music as an option, though not all agreed that peers greatly influenced their choice. Four of the actors and artists

mentioned the presence of friends in the decision making process. Only one of these ten students, Emma, indicated that she chose her option based upon the influence of friends. This finding was contrary to the opinion expressed by the elementary music educators. Ms. Peters suggested that, “as the children grow older, peers take over, and peers, I think, are the most important. If you cool friends are taking an option and you think that person is cool, you are more likely to want to join them.” The evidence from the students appears to the contrary.

Emma told me that she chose drama because her friends were taking drama, and they encouraged her. She is changing directions for grade eight. Four other actors and artists named friends as one of the factors in their decision but it seemed to me that those students needed their friends as sounding boards and for information sharing, rather than for the determination of their final decision. The musicians all spoke of friends as a factor, after the fact, not that they chose music as a group, but the group did choose music, a small difference, but a difference nonetheless. They were just glad that their friends had joined them in band.

Parents, siblings and peers factored into the choice making regarding options. Some of the students were aware of the influence of other significant adults in their decision making as well.

Encouragement from elementary educators as a factor in making the choice.

Through my reading for this study, as confirmed above, researchers have denoted family and peers as influences in students’ decision making. ‘Betweenagers’ also seek guidance from other significant adults. Being naive, or as my sister would call me, a real ‘Pollyanna’, I just assumed that any children who were as articulate as these students

would have had some adult, during the students' elementary school experience, notice the students' gifts and encourage that child to nurture their gifts. During our interviews, when I did not hear any of the actors or artists divulge information on encouragement from significant adults in the students' lives besides their parents, I pressed the participants to remember someone who might have suggested that they give one option, or another, a try. For instance, Ruth chatted for quite some time about her role in a Christmas musical. Later on in our conversation, when I was asking about encouragement from elementary school personnel, I said to her, "perhaps the person in charge of the musical when you played the snowman encouraged you to take some drama lessons some day." Ruth could not recall any such conversation. Only Deborah recalled, "Yeah, I think my music teacher did, but I really don't remember." If any adult in the elementary school of these students made any attempt to encourage the actors and artists one way or another, these students did not remember that as being the case.

It was a different story for the students who chose music. Brett offered, "we just had the best music teacher and she just told us ... like all the time ... music is the place to be, it's going to be where the great kids are, stuff like that." Because Brett had brought it up, I asked Carrie specifically, "What was the most effective piece of the puzzle in your making the choice to take music?" She replied, "Well, (elementary music educator) is really encouraging ... she told me I should go into band ... but she also tells all the kids they should go into music ... because we were all good in music in grade six ... that is what she said." Carrie went on to say, "that was effective because sometimes she would come up to people and single them out and tell them that, like, they should really go into band and she was there when we were trying out the instruments, and she talked to us

then.” Melanie remembered that when “my band teacher in junior high ... um ... he came to our elementary and told us about band and (elementary music teacher) was with him and she told us we should all go into band cause we’re all good and all that.” Sam remembered both his music educator and his homeroom teacher really “pushing band, you know? They told us we were really good, and we should all get into band.” Neither Fergus nor Sarah could remember elementary staff encouraging them specifically to choose any one option. Fergus sniffed and said, “NAAAHH, it could have happened, but not that I know of.” Sarah said thoughtfully,

I don’t think that they did anything like that ... and I don’t think that a teacher would do that ... because that might be kind of influencing them (the student) to do something that, if they didn’t want to do that, kind of might get them into something that they don’t want ... and they might feel bad for saying ... NO ... to a teacher that says you should ... it is just like ... OOOHHHH, now I feel guilty. It would be nice to know that you did something good, but then, if you want to do something else ... that influence might be the wrong thing!”

None of the actors or artists mentioned adults other than their parents encouraging their choices, but the indications of the four musicians who were encouraged by music educators are depicted at Figure 8 (see p. 148).

Only four of the student participants recalled being encouraged to choose one option over the other by a teacher in their elementary years. All of these were students who were encouraged by elementary music educators to choose band. The elementary music educators’ collective memory was that they encouraged all of their students. In our focus group discussion, comments such as “I try to encourage as many of them as

possible to continue in band,” and “I sell band from the time they walk in the door in grade six,” “If someone plays recorder really well, I go Oh WOW, you are going to be great in band, because look at how quickly you picked that up,” were the norm. Two of the elementary educators were a little cautious, reflecting Sarah’s sentiments that teachers should not place undue pressure on students, but would “try to find time to talk to kids one on one. When you know that someone has a particular ability, we owe it to them to ensure that they are aware of that. You know, sometimes they are just not aware that they have a talent!” Ms. Carter reminded the group that “encouraging is different from forcing and pressure.” Ms. Lerner agreed, stating, “in the end it is the respect of the child, and you respect their talents AND decisions.” The elementary music educators clearly felt it their duty to encourage, in a responsible manner, their students to continue in music education in grade seven, and to ensure that those students who had talent were made aware that their talent was real.

The elementary music educators indicated that they believe that they should, responsibly and carefully, encourage students who display talent and interest in an area. The students made me aware that other significant adults played a role in their decision making.

Staff as a factor in making the choice. Earlier in my discussion of the findings of this study, I stated that the students who chose music received information regarding their music option for grade seven from the band teacher that they would study with in grade seven. Further into my conversations with these participants, they indicated that their knowledge of these people, their future teachers, played a role in the students’ decision-making. Brett was so impressed that the band teacher at his school of choice not

only came to Brett's school to talk about the music programme, but that he also brought bands to perform at the elementary school and he also attended the elementary school's concerts. Brett is also savvy enough to know, as well, that the grade seven band teacher is related by marriage to the high school band teacher and "I want to follow all the way through to grade twelve with band with these people because it wouldn't be so much of a transition to shift because they build their programmes together."

Like Brett, Melanie recalled a visit by one of the neighbouring school's band teacher. She said, "I liked my band teacher for junior high ... um ... he came to our elementary, he told us a lot about band and what we were going to do that year." Included in Fergus' discussions with his peers were discussions about the band teacher. He said,

I asked a lot of people what the band teacher was like and they said that she is a very good teacher so like I decided that I thought I think band is a more valuable skill for me than art ... and I think the teaching is better than it is in art...so ... now ... I am going to choose band. I thought the teaching in band was much better than the teaching in art.

Though Sam did not mention staffing as a factor in his choice of option for grade seven, he did say, "I think I am going to continue in band in high school as well 'cause there are good band teachers at my high school." Brett, Fergus, Melanie and Sam considered the faculty when they made their choice, and one mentioned the 'good teacher' as a reason for continuing in band. Staff considerations are referred to in Figure 8 (see p. 148).

The elementary music educators spoke to the issue of staff in their focus group. One of the music teachers expressed dismay that the former band teacher at the school her students go to, moved across the division. Since that time, she felt there had been a

drop in the number of students entering the band programme, and she expressed the opinion that it was a direct result of the change in staff. The music educators whose students now go to said band teachers' present school supported this notion and all three agreed that there had been an increase in the numbers of students enrolling for band since his arrival. Ms. Stark, Ms. Baker and Ms. Warner all referred to the organizational skills and presence of (the new band teacher) as a positive factor in student's choice of music for grade seven. This is anecdotal evidence, not supported or disputed by statistics, but clearly music educators, like their students, believe that the staff involved in an option can be a factor in the decision making by the students.

Family, peers, and significant adults play a role in the decision making by students. For some, outside of school activities also play a role in their decision making.

Outside music lessons as a factor making the choice. The student participants were busy people outside of school. Six of the twelve took some sort of music lessons outside of school time. This activity affected the choice of the two groups differently. April and Jenna studied some form of music outside school. For April, that outside music activity was taken into consideration when she made her choice. April said that "I knew that I was going to take piano ... and guitar, and I didn't want to take music in school ... I wanted to take drama." Jenna also told me that she "thought since I was taking piano that year ... that I didn't want to interfere with anything." For April and Jenna, music experience was already occurring outside of school. Outside music making is denoted at Figure 8 (see p. 148).

Five of the students who chose to take music in grade seven also took music lessons, because, as Sam said, "music is a big part of my life," and the middle years band

teachers said this extra activity benefited their programmes. These were often the keyboard players and sometimes the drummers in the school jazz bands. The elementary music educators understood both positions. Ms. Carter said, “if they are taking music lessons outside school, like, piano, and the choice is not that they are going to stop music education, it is just that they are already doing that and they have interests in other areas that they can do in school.” Ms. Peters agreed and said “I think some kids do it (music) on their own, with their parents’ support, with private music lessons and things like that.” Outside of school music lessons might influence the choice either way.

Family, friends, significant adults, and outside of school activities all have a place in the decision making regarding options. The students were also aware of their own strengths and passion.

Passion as a factor in making the choice. Whether adults call it the “element”, flow, or passion, two of the students, who did not choose music as an option, made their choice based upon ‘it’. Ruth, who I have already said gave herself time away from her friends by choosing art, stated, “I have always loved art.” Thaddeus chose art because it allowed him the opportunity of

just being creative ... thinking up your own thing ... for art classes you could put whatever you wanted wherever you wanted in the piece you were working on. I felt more connected to art ... I don’t know why ... I wasn’t as much into music as art. I just felt more ... I could be more outgoing or creative in art than in music ... I don’t know why.

Ruth and Thaddeus chose their passion, what they loved, where they could be creative. It is interesting to note that that both of these students were students who consciously chose

what their friends did not. Their interest in the area seemed to overrule what others were encouraging them to do.

After learning what information the students had about their options in grade seven, and how they went about making their decision about the options, such as talking to family, parents and peers, and considering their capabilities, I asked the students that had chosen music, straight on, why they chose music. Why, when all was said and done, did they choose to take music over the other options available to them? Some were more articulate about this than others, but five of the students identified what Dewey (Hausman, 1971) describes as the ideal mental condition, Robinson (2009) describes as the 'element' and what Csikszentmihalyi (1993) calls 'flow' as the reason for their choice.

Brett told me that he knew at age three that he was a musician. Age three, yeah... we had a nursery school that had a music teacher come in once a month and we had singing and, again, percussion instruments... not like xylophones, cause we were too young to do that, but like bells and whistles ... things like that ... and she would bring them in ... so we could just goof off and play and I knew!

Carrie was more succinct. "That choice was easy," she said. "I think really it is just that I am really into music and I just want to play music, so it was pretty easy for me to choose." Fergus was not so straight forward, but when asked why he chose music for grade seven he said,

Well ... when we finished our songs, and some of them I really liked ... playing them ... and I really enjoyed like they were ... like they were good music? And I enjoyed playing them ... and I think that was my favourite part!

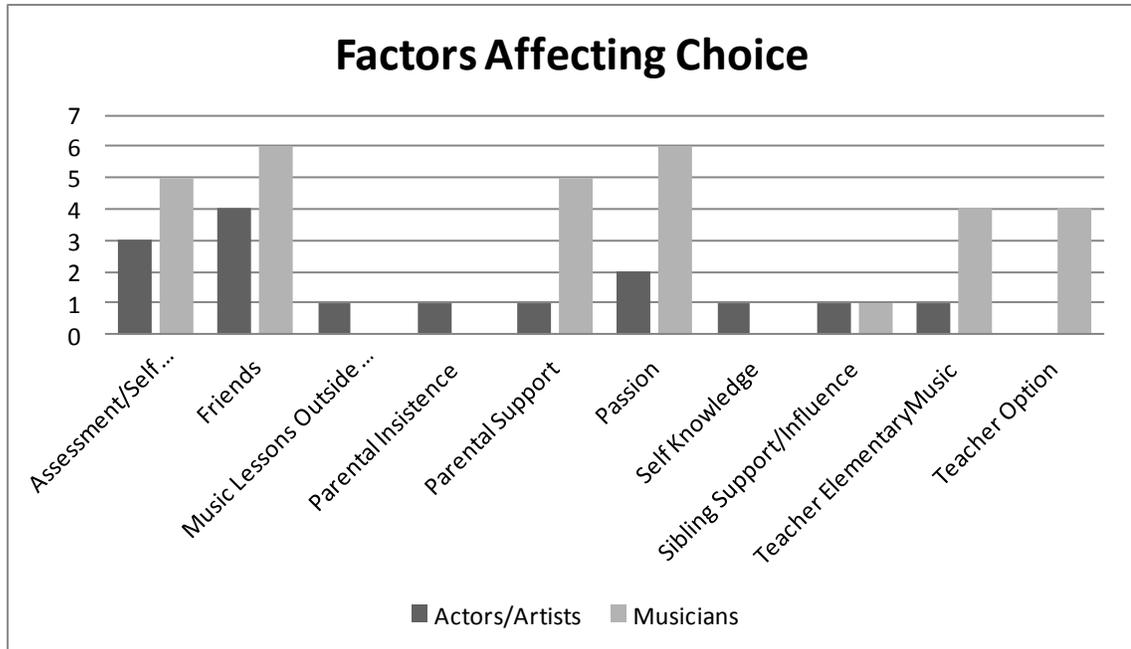


Figure 8. Comparison of the factors affecting the choice of music.

Fun was a large part of Melanie’s decision making, and I could not find a way to have her describe the fun in music for me. She simply said, “I just chose band because it’s easier for me and I like music a lot better ... yeah ... I thought music was fun ... better, I just wanted to take band because music was really ... fun.” She went on to say that, “I chose band because I had a music experience already ... I play piano and I really like music ... it’s my all, it’s everything ... I really like playing music and I wanted to learn the instrument so I chose band.” Sam said,

it wasn’t really a hard decision because I think I knew like at the beginning of the year that I was going to choose band cause music is actually a big part of my life? It’s just been a big part of my life and I think that I just want to continue along the path of musicality.

Sarah also said that music was fun and expanded on that thought by saying,

I chose music because it is really fun and you get to like...it is almost like art, but

it is not...it is like..... music...music is really communicative. I took a little bit into consideration how I did in ...um how I did in music in elementary school, but it ... was mostly because I really like music.”

Besides the support of parents and family, the influence of peers, the input from teachers, these students may also have found their passion, an activity that gave them flow, as Ken Robinson (2009) calls it, their ‘element’. The factors affecting the students’ choices are presented in Figure 8 (see p. 148).

In both teacher focus groups there was much discussion around what factors encourage students to take music. Both groups of music educators talked about peers, friends, family, the teachers’ role in the choice, and the dissemination of information about band programmes. Only two of the ten music educators mentioned that the students’ own interests might bear weight in the choice. Ms. Lerner stated in particular that at one of her schools the grade six home room teacher is an artist, and the students in her class produce “spectacular” work. “Who would discourage those students from pursuing art?” she said.

Two of the students who chose art or drama, and five of the students who chose music chose on the basis of their passion. That might be described as “fun” or “love” or “really into it” but it comes down to the students’ choosing based upon how they feel, personally, about the option. As the elementary music educators agreed, no one would want to discourage students’ following their passion. Along with passion, the students who chose music and the elementary music educators would agree that the students skill, and their knowledge thereof also factors into the decision to take music.

Assessment as a factor in making the music the option of choice. Assessment

in music class was something that the six music students thought about in their deliberations about their choices for grade seven. After outlining what skills were assessed in his elementary school music class, such as note names, rhythms, and musical genres, Brett went on to say that he knew that he could be successful in band because we did lots of music, like reading notes and we read music and we would say the notes and I knew what I was going to have to do it in grade seven for band, and if I could do rhythms and beats and understand concepts in music, then all I have to do is pick up an instrument, and put that on them! You know that you will be prepared for (the band programme in his grade seven school) because you have gone through (his elementary school).

Brett summed things up by saying, “All I can say is, that if you know your rhythms, and know how to read music ... well ... you should pick up an instrument ... and you will know what to do!” When asked about assessment practices in elementary school generally, Carrie stated,

well, we were always just a bit confused about how people got marked in art ... like was it our art work? They don't mark our stuff ... but like we just asked our teacher and they said ... like ... if we are paying attention and if we are just doing, everything and not just talking ... like I don't really know.

But Carrie was very cognizant of how she was assessed in elementary music class.

We were learning about pitches and note values ... rhythms ... all that ... so sometimes with (music teacher) ... she would sometimes give us homework that we would have to ... like ... write down the different notes and stuff and she would mark that ... and we also had ... like recorder tests and she marked that

down. I knew I would know my stuff for band.

Fergus remembered always doing well in music, and that was determined because he had, good rhythm skills ... singing ... my singing voice was good ... I could follow all the rhythms, I could do ... play all the notes I could play the solos, I could do the do re mi fa so la ti do ... and the sheet music ... we had to tell what the pitches were on the sheet music...so I knew I could do band.

Melanie remembered recorder tests, and the note reading that recorder tests necessitated, and she stated that,

we had plays and they could test how we sang and stuff. There was a sheet that said do things a certain way. And I could read music and I think that helped me because I knew the notes and ... yeah ... in the band there are different notes that are actually the same note ... but they all sound the same but we have different keys, and I can figure that out 'cause I knew I could play recorder and piano.

While Brett, Carrie, Melanie and Fergus felt that their self-knowledge of assessment and how they did in elementary music class put them in good stead for band, Sarah had a different take on assessment. She agreed the students were “pretty well prepared for (grade seven band) because our (elementary music educator) did to a lot of like showing us even one on one....and she did help at lunch and stuff like that”, but she thought that assessment might

influence them (student's in grade six) a little bit ... 'cause if they did a super good in like ... music ... you know ... they look good in music ... they think they are ... like the best player ever, and if they did really good in art ... they might go into art ... but sometimes people don't just really want to do that ... and they

don't really care about their marks ... and so they will just do whatever they do. The students were well aware of assessment practices, and although there was some confusion about what was being assessed in other option areas, five of the music students were comfortable with their choice of music in grade seven based upon their knowledge of their music skills, both personal knowledge of their skills, and that knowledge of their skills that came through assessment.

The elementary music educators were well aware of the effect assessment has on students. Talk of skills, literacy and reporting, led the elementary music educators to discuss assessment. The students talked about sometimes being unsure about how they were being assessed in some subject areas and on just what their reports were based. The conversation in the focus group indicated that the students are not alone in that thought.

Ms. Warner began the conversation.

The whole assessment thing is so complicated, and we do have to be true to assessment. But, I don't want to turn kids off, and I don't want to make them feel badly. I think that the time to do assessment is in the classroom when you are teaching. I know that for some, the way they feel about themselves in music, the ones who are doing really well, they don't really care, it doesn't really affect them one way or the other, but the ones with lower marks, that either affirms what they suspect, or it makes them feel badly about themselves. We just really have to be careful about how we make the students see themselves.

Ms. Andrews suggested that there is a reason that music educators struggle with assessment. She said,

We are assessing an art and an art form, and that is a very precarious thing to do. I

agree, that for your subject matter to hold credence, you have to show a child's learning, but showing a child's learning in the arts is not as concrete as a right or a wrong answer. Our assessment reporting should be very verbal, very strong and it should be appropriate to what we are teaching.

Ms. Stark agreed with everything said, and "Our challenge is to make sure that we really back up what descriptor it is that the mark is reflecting. That work is so important in ensuring that they know what they are being graded on". Then Ms. Baker stated, "It is important, definitely because students do use report cards as a determining factor." And Ms Lerner added,

and the report card demands literacy, right? I go round and round on this. I agree that their assessment affects their choices. I try to be clear, I give rubrics, and I go over and over it, but there is the time thing. Am I going to sit there and explain, like, EVERYTHING???? It takes too much time, time we do not have. I really struggle with that. It is hard. The thing that bothers me the most about this are those kids who think 'Oh, I just suck at this, I can't play recorder, I can't read music, but they CAN, it just is such a head thing and OH it really bothers me because that DOES influence their decision and it is such a preconceived thing that they have of themselves and they get sometimes, and to get them out of that is so hard. I try to be so positive, and try to do all these things and they just have a preconceived idea that they can't. They just don't believe in themselves, as corny as that sounds, they don't have that confidence. I really struggle with that!"

Ms. Peters struggles with the same thing.

Assessment does influence their choices, it DOES influence the kids. I agree that

the ones that are really strong, they are fine, but the ones you want to encourage, oh, I struggle with that. Sometimes, I think I have something great figured out, and KABOOM, it is in ruins, you know. It is important, we are also gauging how we teach, what needs more work, and where we need to go, but I do stress with my kids that it is important for them to be assessing how THEY are improving, not checking against other people.

If the students struggle with understanding how they are being assessed in some areas, it could be because their teachers are struggling with that as well. The students' perception of assessment were different from each other, but whether they were referring to assessment in art, or in music, there was some lack of understanding about how and what was being assessed. Sarah reminded me how important assessment, and report cards are when she told me that she was sure that some students would base their decision on what their report card said, and then might be disappointed when they do not do as well in their option as they expected.

Assessment is clearly on the minds of the students and of the music educators. If the students use assessment as part of their decision making regarding their options for grade seven, these music educators are trying their best to give their students full and accurate information on their music skills. The music students indicated that a positive reflection of their music skills in their assessment factored into their decision making. The students that chose art or drama did not mention that skill or knowledge in their area of choice factored into their decision.

This study was also about the factors that direct students away from music. I turn to that discussion now.

Factors that Discourage Students from Choosing Music as an Option

Through doing this study, I was trying to discover, from the students' own perspective why, or why not, students choose to take music in grade seven. The actors and artists had told me the factors that encouraged them to take drama or art, then I asked them, "why not music?" Factors such as affinity for one area of study over another, the knowledge that another option carries specific benefits for the learner, musical literacy, the assessment of skills in music, fear of the unknown territory of band, learning style and good grades as a goal came up in our conversation. The students' thoughts on these topics are recorded here.

April. April bears special mention here because she had unique and interesting perspectives on two fronts. She understood her learning style, and she also had an understanding of what she needed for her own personal growth. Speaking to her learning style, through our time together she talked about her difficulty with learning in a group. She said,

I don't like taking band in school because I find it easier to work with just one other person and ... and it doesn't really help me out because you have like three classes put into one for band. There's like eight grade seven classes ... like ... um ... in English and French ... and, like, it would probably be split into two ... and like, a bunch of people in each class. I don't like working in big groups and it irritated me and I knew I would find it, like, hard to work with people around you playing different instruments ... and everybody has different instruments and they are all practicing at the same time. I can't do that.

Previously, I noted that April acted consistently with her own needs and desires when she

said that her friends were encouraging her to go into art. In choosing drama, she was being true to own decision and to her desire for her own personal growth. April explained her reasoning and the process she went through in her choice of drama, and for not choosing band. She told me that

I have always been really shy on stage and everything, and I wanted to get over that, that fear. My parents wanted me to go into band, but I said I wanted to take drama ... and I ... and all my friends were going into art ... and nobody was going into band or drama, and I still went into drama. It is better for me cause I am getting over my fear like shyness and everything? I am really shy ... like I am super shy in front of new people and like, I don't even look at people ... and when like they are new or something ... and I don't really talk a lot and stuff ... and that is what I needed to do?? Get over my fear. And now I can do plays in front of people!

April chose to take drama as her option because she saw a benefit for herself in studying drama, this from the girl who signed up to try out for the school play in grade four, but erased her name from the list before the tryout occurred. She was already studying guitar and piano outside of school, which suited her learning style to a greater extent than the group learning in band. April saw a benefit for herself in studying drama, and did not allow others to dissuade her from that choice.

The other student participants. Emma stated that, "I didn't feel like I excelled at like.... musical things. I am better at art.... at drawing...and making stuff." Like Emma, Deborah

never thought I was good at it (music)... considering the fact that I couldn't do

the scale ... read the scale, I guess ... it was just pointless ... for me to go ... and I ... I don't know ... I don't find that I am talented in any way in music!! When all you are doing is reading from the staff and trying to learn a song in band ... and ... um ... you don't know that you are going to be able to do that ... that is a problem!

When I asked Jenna if there was anything that discouraged her from taking music she replied,

I am not sure ... I don't know ... music ... just wasn't my best ... wasn't just something that I felt confident in doing ... that I was comfortable doing ... and drama ... was something that I was comfortable with and I knew that. Band ... was something new ... it's just ... I was kind of scared to try and learn a new instrument because I might struggle with it or I might have trouble learning all the notes.

Jenna also said something that fostered a change in the interview protocol for this study.

She said,

if somebody has a really good grade in art ... and um ... and gets a not so great grade in music ... um ... then ... that will probably persuade them to join art ... thinking well, maybe that is just going to be an easier good grade to get.

After my discussion with Jenna, I asked other students if their grades in music factored into their decision. Ruth did not feel comfortable choosing music because

I have never been good at reading music ... I always sucked at it ... I think I must have zoned out in that year when we learned ... cause like ... when we were doing recorder and I was like was ... that was the other thing ... when I came to

(the school she now attends) it was ... I was half way through the recorder ... everybody else knew how to play and they were starting with the Alto in a couple of months and I couldn't even play the little one!

While it was not specifically grades that dissuaded Ruth, she understood that her skills in music were not on par with her peers at her new school. The girls were matter of fact in their speaking about skills as a factor in their choice making. It was Thaddeus who became emotional. I asked him to tell me any reason or reasons that he could think of as to why he did not choose music, and he replied,

well, you have to have a real in depth connection with music ... like you have to understand everything like, and I don't even understand reading music, like I couldn't figure it out ... and that was one of the reason why I didn't go to band .. [tearing up] ... I just didn't understand that.

At that point I redirected to another topic, as Thaddeus was visibly upset, but later he came back to it and said,

I remember the only people that really knew how to read music were people that had been taking classes outside of school, like (names three friends), and (one friend) had been doing violin so she understood that ... (another friend) had been taking drums, so he understood that, but I didn't really understand. Music seemed more complicated to me, I don't know why ... art just kind of sounded kind of smooth, easier, free going, just do whatever ... there were no wrong ideas.

The ability to read music, the ability to play recorder using music, figuring out the staff, all of these phrases pointed to sticking points in the choice of music as an option for the actors and the artists, while it was the exact opposite for the musicians.

These students were very articulate in their expression of their reasons for choosing what they chose as their option and their reasons for not choosing music. For April, learning in a group was a deterrent from taking band and she felt that she needed, personally, what drama had to offer. Jenna made me aware that grades on a report card, and the potential for good grades, may be a factor in the choice. She also alluded to a fear of the unknown, not knowing what band would be like. Jenna, Emma and Thaddeus talked about an affinity for their option of choice, or of not feeling connected to a different option. Emma, Deborah, Jenna Rachel and Thaddeus all talked about musical literacy, or lack thereof, as an obstacle to choosing music. These factors are depicted at Figure 9a.

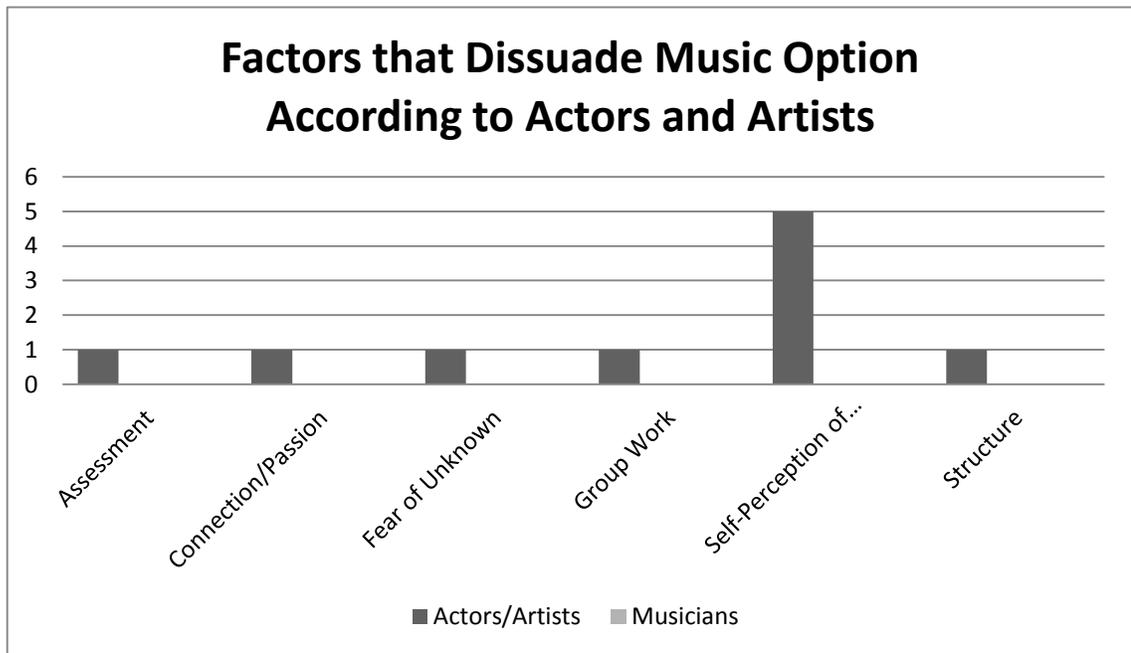


Figure 9a. Perceptions of actors and artists as to why students do not choose music.

Though they had chosen music, four of the students who chose music had thoughts on what might discourage others from choosing music as an option. Carrie acknowledged that she received lots of information from the band teacher and was able,

on the night when the students tried out the instruments, to get a sound on any instrument that she tried. She did remember, as well, that

some of the kids who went to art ... they couldn't play anything ... that is one of the reasons why they went to art and not band. And, if they only had one instrument that they could play, one instrument that they could get a sound out of, and (band teacher) said, if too many people are playing the same instrument, they have to choose another one that they could play, because like, if we were all playing the same instrument it wouldn't be band, so they might of thought that they would have to play an instrument that they couldn't get a sound out of.

Carrie also remarked that “maybe, I guess if you thought that you did really bad in music ... then you kind of would think, oh ... I should go into art, because I don't want to get a bad mark in band.” Choice of instrument, self perception of skill and grades could factor in to the choice.

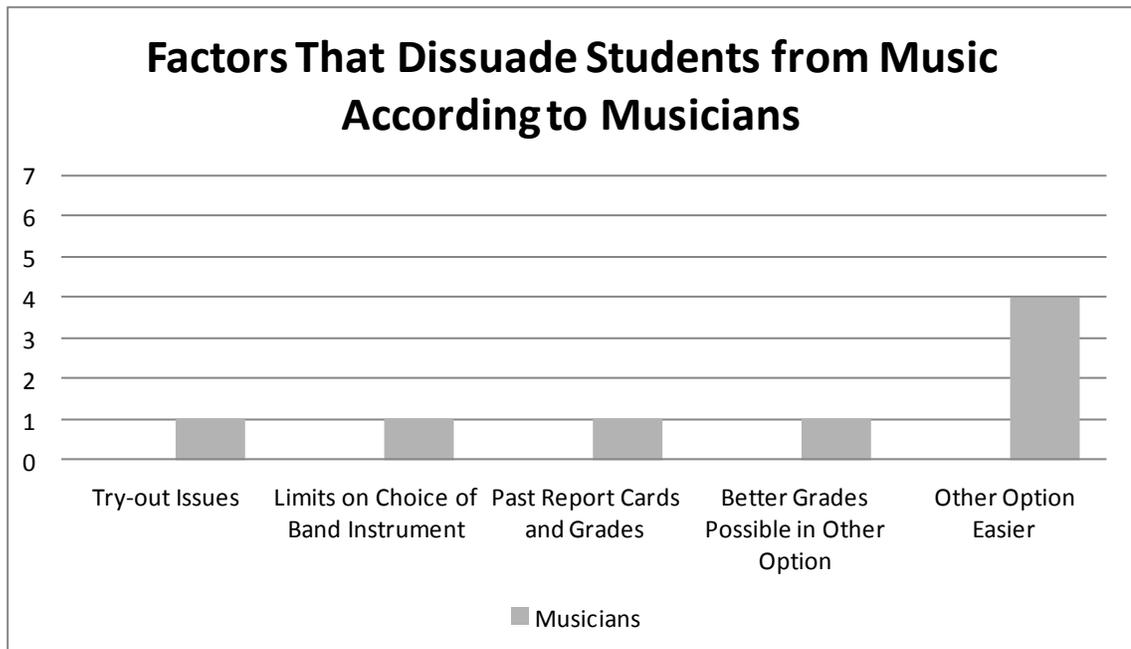


Figure 9b. Perceptions of musicians as to why students do not choose music.

Fergus picked up on a theme that Sam mentioned when we discussed friends as a factor in choosing their option. The reader may remember that Sam thought that some of the students chose art only because it was the only other option besides band. When we were talking about his friends, Fergus said, “a lot of people chose art because it was easier ... and that is true.” Melanie, who studies piano and who thought that she was well prepared for band, said, “when I was thinking about junior high, I was thinking about whether it (band) would be hard or not, you know?” Sam also alluded to the perceived difficulty of band. He said, “Well ... they think that it (band) is hard, you know?” These students thought that others might be dissuaded because of a perception of the difficulty of the music programme. The perceptions of the students who chose music of factors that dissuade students from choosing music are depicted at Figure 9b.

The music educators and band teachers listed many factors that they thought might discourage the choice of music as an option in grade seven. They ranged from lack of home practice to hone the students’ skills, to unsatisfactory elementary music experiences, to staff turnover at the elementary schools in the music area. They also mentioned the some students’ opportunity to study music outside of school hours which precludes the necessity of studying music in school. Some of the music educators also wondered if cost might be a factor.

Some of the teachers’ comments regarding factors that discourage the choice of music explain their thoughts more fully. The influence of family was seen as two sides of the coin. In one situation Ms. Baker said that families discouraged the study of music in that “I think a lot of them are not encouraged at home to practice music. I know this because in speaking to the parents, they don’t look at it as something extremely important

and so, for them, art is a good option.” Ms. Peters added, “Not only that. Often Dads don’t see music as a masculine thing to do in some families, and that music is not for boys in our family, and it can be quite obvious in the children and their actions.” The other side of the family coin might be, according to Ms. Carter,

that they (the students) are taking music lessons outside school, like, piano, and the choice is not that they are going to stop music education, it is just that they are already doing that and they have interests in other areas that they can do in school.

Ms. Peters agreed with Ms. Carter, and said, “I think some kids do it (music) on their own, with their parents support, with private music lessons and things like that.” Family circumstances were suggested when Ms. Stark said “it is unfortunate for some of the students that they can not afford the band instruments.” The suggestions of the elementary music educators are that some families do not value music enough to encourage work on music at home, some families do not encourage music study for their sons, some value music enough to provide private music instruction, therefore students do not have to study music at school, and some families, whether they value music education or not, may find the school music programme cost prohibitive.

I have already talked about Deborah’s parents’ decision to enroll her in the drama option. The other actors and artists, particularly April, would agree with these music educators that if they are already studying an instrument outside of school, they are free to study something else at school. None of the students mentioned that they thought any family would discourage music study based upon gender. None of the students mentioned that cost would be a factor, however, all of the student participants lived with two parents

in single family, well appointed homes. Cost may not have occurred to this group of participants.

One of the factors that the elementary music educators raised that may influence students to continue music in grade seven, or not, is their experience in the elementary school music room. Ms. Lerner said, well, we just have to be so good at what we do. How many people have we heard say, ‘Oh, you teach music. I had this music teacher, she used to bang on the piano and everyone would wince when she got mad!’ Those people never went on in music! You know it’s true!” Ms. Lerner encouraged the rest of the members of the focus group to look at their programmes. One area of their programmes that the music educators talked about was skill development. Before I go on to that, I remind the reader that all twelve of the student participants had enjoyed their elementary music experience, with one exception. Fergus enjoyed his time from K-3, but then had a series of new music educators over three years that left him a little disillusioned. However, five of the students who chose band said that not only did they enjoy their elementary music experience, they felt that they had acquired the musical skill necessary to be successful in band. The actors and artists also enjoyed elementary music, but five of them told me that they did not feel that they had the skills necessary to be successful in band.

The elementary music educators volunteered some areas of the elementary school music programme that that they thought might discourage students from choosing music in grade seven, and these included skills. Ms. Baker thought that,

for some, their skill base is lacking, and it is not because I haven’t tried, but, I think by the time they head into Junior High, the complexity of a new instrument

is just too overwhelming, and I think that for them the idea of going into an art class and not having to do homework or practicing is much more suitable to them.

The other music educators agreed that musical skills are a factor in making the choice and wondered about the juxtaposition of reality and the students' self-perception of their skills.

Ms. Andrews spoke to that issue when she said

In music class, the students are kind of out there, in front of everybody, showing what they know and don't know. When they are writing a math test or a social studies test, they, it is on a piece of paper, at their desk. Nobody sees their mark, nobody sees the questions they are answering or not. BUT, when everybody is playing recorder together, or playing instruments at the same time, everybody knows who squeaked the recorder, or whose mallets are going the wrong way, or the kid who is too loud, or who doesn't get it period. You don't even have to assess it. They assess themselves. They look around the room and they think 'oh, everybody else is doing it and I am not. I must not be good at this!

Ms. Lerner added that this can lead to "not feeling confident in music." And Ms. Stark finished with,

I agree. I think it is how successful THEY feel as a performer, especially on the recorder. If they feel that they have had difficulty with literacy, that is a big factor. I have students who can play by ear so beautifully, but they can't read, period, and they know that they will not be successful in band. If they feel unsuccessful in the music class, they are not going to band, no matter what you put on a report card.

The music educators agreed with the student participants that the student's skill, or their self-perception of their skill may be a factor in their decision making. Ms. Lerner's comment about the report card brought the music educators back to the topic of assessment, and another factor that the participants mentioned, their grades in one subject or another.

Ms. Warner agreed with some of the students that report cards sometimes have an effect, especially if the report card shows, "A very strong ability in one of the other options. Then they think the other options will be easier, take less effort for a better mark." Ms. Stark added, "you might be right, because they know that in the other options, they don't have to practice, they don't have to study,....wellll!" The music educators indicated that skill level, musical literacy, a reported strength in another area that requires less personal effort may sway students' choices away from music.

The actors and artists did mention skills, or their perceived lack of skill in music as reason to choose another option. I personally had taught some of the actors and artists, and when I reminded them that I had personally told them they were doing fine, one of them said that she remembered me talking with her, and remembered telling me that she just didn't know, she just didn't feel that she 'got it'. The participants' elementary music educators agree with the students that the reasons for not choosing music as an option can be many and varied, but skill development or the student's perception of their ability or lack of it in music was the factor mentioned most often. The music educators also talked about finances, which had not occurred to the students.

The band teachers began the discussion of the factors that dissuade children from band with a comparison of the schools from which their students come, and some of the

activities and situations that affect enrollment in grade seven band. Ms. Norris, who worked in a K-8 school told us that she worked “in a privileged area, and as children transition to a new level of school, we often lose them to private schools and some of those schools do not have music programmes. Ms. Harris said

my area is not privileged, but one of my feeder schools is a French Immersion school, which, geographically, is not in my area, so sometimes those students, they don't come to us, they go to other schools in their area and I am not sure what they choose, and some of them go to private schools where there is no band.

Mr. Findlay harkened back to his days at another middle years school in the division and agreed that grade six is a transition year for some families who can afford to send their children to private schools, and some of those private schools do not offer music instruction.

Though the band teachers talked about families who could afford private schools, they also talked about finances as a factor that could discourage students from choosing band. Ms said,

sometimes I think it might be a money issue, but it is hard to ferret out that as the real reason so that we can intervene. I don't know what happens at other schools, but you know we try to provide an instrument if there is a financial need there, but that does not always happen. Sometimes we just don't know that that is a factor.

Mr. Findlay said,

I make sure that finances are part of the conversation that I have when I visit the schools. I tell them in the large group that if it is a money thing, come and talk to me. We make sure that everyone has an instrument whether you can afford it or

not. But the message, when you are talking with sixth graders, may get lost and may not get home.

Ms. Harris added that, “in some cultures, you just do not ask (for financial support)”.

The cost of renting an instrument, and other associated costs of a grade seven band programme were also mentioned by the elementary specialists, but it was not an issue that was raised by the student participants.

The elementary music educators took personal responsibility for making their programmes engaging and fulfilling for their students. The students’ background in school music came under scrutiny in the discussion with the band teachers. Mr. Findlay thought out loud that

perhaps some students just didn’t have a great experience in their elementary school music, they didn’t like recorder or they didn’t like singing or something about it stuck, like they didn’t get along with their teacher and that was enough for them to say, I have done music and I will take something else.

Ms. Harris, who had taught elementary music at one time, agreed that that might happen, and said,

if they have not had a positive experience in music class, they assume that they are not going to have a positive experience in band. If they did not like playing the recorder, for instance, they sometimes don’t choose band.

These band teachers thought that perhaps students may not choose band if they had not had a positive elementary school music experience. The student participants who chose art and drama all said that they had enjoyed elementary school music. I now wonder if Ruth’s experience in grade four, with the principal who wanted to teach violin, but who

often did not show up for class, may have coloured Ruth's experience more than she let on. The question of a positive experience in elementary music class would be a good topic for another study.

As the members of the band teachers' focus group thought about what might dissuade students from continuing in music, the conversation drifted from negative experience to the possible effect of elementary music staff turnover on the students. Ms. Harris noted that,

in the last three years, there have been three different people teaching the music programme in grades five and six and the art teacher remained the same in the school in that time, and I have been teaching the band programme and enrolment did go down, when there wasn't the same continuity, so there is also an aspect of knowing what to expect in the art programme, and they are not sure what to expect out of the band programme.

Ms. Norris was working in a similar situation and said

I have been teaching at my school for the past two years, I had an idea where they were coming from, but I know also, that, like at Ms. Harris' school, I was the fifth or sixth band teacher in five or six years, there was not that continuity, and the same thing with the elementary part of our school, there had been two teachers. The previous teacher was there only three years, and the teacher prior to that was only there for two years ... and there has not been continuity for the students, and I think that plays a part in the students' capabilities and the skill and comfort level.

Mr. Findlay added to this theme and said,

one of my feeder schools has gone through a few different teachers over the last couple of years, and went from a long time teacher to a few less experienced teachers, so there was some transition things with the kids there. In the other school there was a very experienced music teacher who took a years' leave to do a teacher's exchange, and so her classes were taught for a year by a teacher from another country, and so there have been some challenges that happened there, and it shows in the students' skills and attitudes.

Lack of consistency in a programme may lead to fewer students choosing music. All but one of the student participants who chose art or drama came from schools where there had been elementary music staff turnover.

The band teachers talked about their perception that turnover of elementary music specialists affects the skill acquisition of the students negatively. Ms. Norris said, "If they know that they are weak musically, they may not choose band." Ms. Harris agreed and said, "If they do not feel that they did well, if there was some gap in their understanding, they would not choose music". Ms. Norris continued,

Their skills seemed to be dependent upon what their teacher, or each teacher seemed to focus on. The teacher previous to me, she focused on singing, that was her thing, choir, and not so much note reading or recorder playing from the staff. I noticed that my students did not know how to read music, their music literacy was not strong.

Ms. Harris also mentioned that, with all the changes of personnel, "there were a number of students who had very negative feelings towards music, because their skills were weak. They just feel that they are not going to be good at band".

The band teachers conversation put me in mind, again, of the five participants in the study who told me that they had chosen art or drama partially because they felt that they did not understand the ‘scale’ or that they could play recorder but ‘not from the staff’, and that awareness had factored into their decision making. Five of the actors and artists came from schools where the music educator had turned over once or twice, during their elementary school life, and in one of the schools, there had been a succession of specialists and substitutes due to illness. The sixth participant, Ruth, had moved often and had had a variety of music experience in her elementary years. Perhaps this inconsistency in their elementary music experience led to some gaps in skill development, or the perception that the students lacked in music skills.

The discussion with the band teachers regarding the factors that dissuade students from music gradually turned to the other options available to the students. Ms. Harris opened that part of the conversation with

some kids are just really, really good artists and they want to continue with that.

I have had two students who have come to choir, because they chose art, but want to maintain a connection with music. Sometimes I think that they choose art because they think it will be easy, and there won’t be anybody to let down. You can be more private about not working in art, it is more anonymous, or not achieving as much in that setting, so sometimes they go into art because they don’t want the pressure of letting the other kids in the band down.

That comment set Ms. Norris off. She opened with a statement that students may be “strong in art, so they can decide that they want to do that instead” and then continued with

“Our art teacher gives no tests! It is all projects that are done in class, all class work, so, in band there are tests and practical tests, and the kids know, or they perceive, that being in band is more work, and art is less work, and they get anxiety over the tests, so, it is easier to take art.

The possibilities that a student might have a passion for another option, or a perception that the workload might be easier in the other option, were both cited by the band teachers as reasons for not taking band. Thaddeus, Ruth, Deborah and Emma talked about their passion for art, and Fergus expressed the thought that some students might perceive the workload in art as easier. Sam also said that some students chose art, because it wasn't band. It was interesting that Ms. Norris uttered almost the same quote as Sam, but in the reverse. She said, “It is essentially the kids that DON'T go into band, who go into art.”

Grades, skills, elementary experience, finances, work load, passion for another option or the perception that another option may be easier, were all discussed by the band teachers. The student participants and the elementary music educators spoke about their the students' peers and the effect that they had on the students choices, but the only comment made by a band teacher in our hour and a half together was a comment by Ms. Harris.

Often it goes in trends, dependent upon who the natural leaders in the group are, sometimes they pull more students into the band programme, and sometimes they pull more students in to the art programme. They are looking to stay with friends.

The band teachers in this focus group did not place responsibility for choice on peers.

When considering the factors that might hinder students from choosing music as their option, the students talked about: their perception of their music skills, their grades or assessment in elementary music, their interest in the other option or options, the perceived ‘ease’ of the other option or the fact that better grades might be possible in the other option, the instrumental try-out and the limits on choice of instrument, learning style as it relates to the structure of band and group work, and the ‘fear’ of the unknown or not knowing what to expect in band. Their teachers also talked about skills and assessment, and interest in other options, whether that be based on passion or the possibility of good grades. The teachers talked about the elementary music experience in general, family finances, and the fact that some students are able take private music lessons outside of school as factors in the choice against music. The elementary teachers added peers to the discussion and the band teachers talked about the move to private schools as factors that might steer students away from band in grade seven

Factors that Discourage Musicians from other Options

When the musicians had opinions as to what might keep others out of music, I hoped that they would also be able to tell me why they did not choose other options available to them. Only two of the musicians had reasons that they could articulate for this.

Brett’s mind seemed to be on the marketability of the skill set of the option of choice. He said,

Yeah ... where as if you choose art ... it is so individual, and you don’t know how the public is going to like your art ... it is personal and uh ... it just ... it would be harder to have a career in art and be an artist ... cause you see a lot more

performances ... by musicians like ... I think ... I don't know if it is true.

It was also Brett who had chosen not to take art when it was offered over the lunch hour as an extra or supplementary course. Through our conversation, Sarah referred again and again to social relationships, drama in those relationships, and mentioned references to bullying in the presentation by the band teacher at her new school during her tour of the school. She was referring to the drama option when she told me,

like, if they are really shy, ... um ... it is not really fair, because in drama they could get really scared ... cause if you did drama you would be in front of people ... they do these like little plays and stuff ... and like ... uh ... concerts so ... um ... it would be like a little bit scary for some people who are more shy ... and like ... if they are not as dramatic ... they might ... people might make fun of them for not being as good a someone ... they might like ... mock them? So it is important for kids to have that choice.

In the following statement she talks about peer pressures that border on bullying.

Sometimes if you make , like, a decision and people don't think that is proper ... they might like get mad at you ... like if your friends don't want you in that ... they might get mad at you and then if you are put like in that with your friend ... or like somebody you don't like ... that might just be like ... I don't want to be in that class , and that would take all the fun out of actually being in that class ... cause like it all would be like ... you are really scared of someone who is like a bully, if he ... if they are in the class with you , you might be a little more timid ... and you might have less enthusiasm for that class.

I think maybe so!

Only two of the musicians had thoughts as to why other options might not be chosen. One factor suggested was the future marketability of the skill set acquired in the other option, the second suggested that a different choice might open the student to social scrutiny.

Knowledge of the Benefits of the Option that the Students have Chosen

It was interesting to me that Brett would suggest that the skills that he was acquiring in the band programme would be more easily marketable than skills that he might acquire in art. Brett's interview was the first interview that I carried out in this study, and because he mentioned a benefit of his option choice, I included a question in the protocol for the rest of my interviews about what the students understood to be the benefits, to them, of the option that they chose.

The actors and artists were quite forthcoming with opinions as to what the benefits of their option were. Development of self confidence, self-concept, new and trusting relationships and friendships were all stated as benefits of the options these students chose.

April, who had already told me that she took drama in order to gain self-confidence in social and performance settings told me once again, "that is what I need to do ... get over my fear." The exercises that her class participated in together developed trust amongst the participants and April also found new friendships. "Then I noticed that there were people that I never, like never was friends with and now I have become really good friends with them because of drama." Deborah, who took drama at her parent's insistence, understood from them that drama could help her "in a career way ... they said I would be more successful with drama behind me than I would be with art", but she

could not articulate why her parents might believe that. Deborah did say, though, like April, that, “it would help me be more comfortable in front of people ... I guess when I am giving a presentation or something ... cause I am not really good at that ... getting up in front of people and talking to them ... and it has helped a little.” Jenna found that drama, “helped me to express myself ... a lot more, and acting ... trying to be a different person ... it has helped me realize things about myself , helped me express myself, helped me make new friends.”

April, Deborah and Jenna found new self-confidence, and new friends in their drama experience. Emma also found new self-confidence in performing in front of others, but also found new self-knowledge. Emma said that,

being in drama has, like, made me realize that I really didn't make my own decision. I just made the decision that my friends wanted. Well, I guess besides that, I can speak without hesitating and get my thoughts out better, but maybe the whole junior high year might have helped with that.

The students who chose drama readily spoke to the benefits of their choice. Ruth and Thaddeus, who studied art, spoke of spending time with friends during the art class time. Both these folks also spoke about the fact that there is very little free time in middle years schools and enjoyed the down time of lunch hour. Ruth said, “our teacher explains the project, puts the music on, and we work ... um ... we can talk if we want, but we work and visit at the same time, you know?” Time with friends seems important to these students. Thaddeus spoke again of the opportunity to express himself creatively.

You know, we have these projects, but you can do your own take on them.

Different shapes, different colours ... uh ... different materials. We all do the

same project, but they never, ever come out the same.

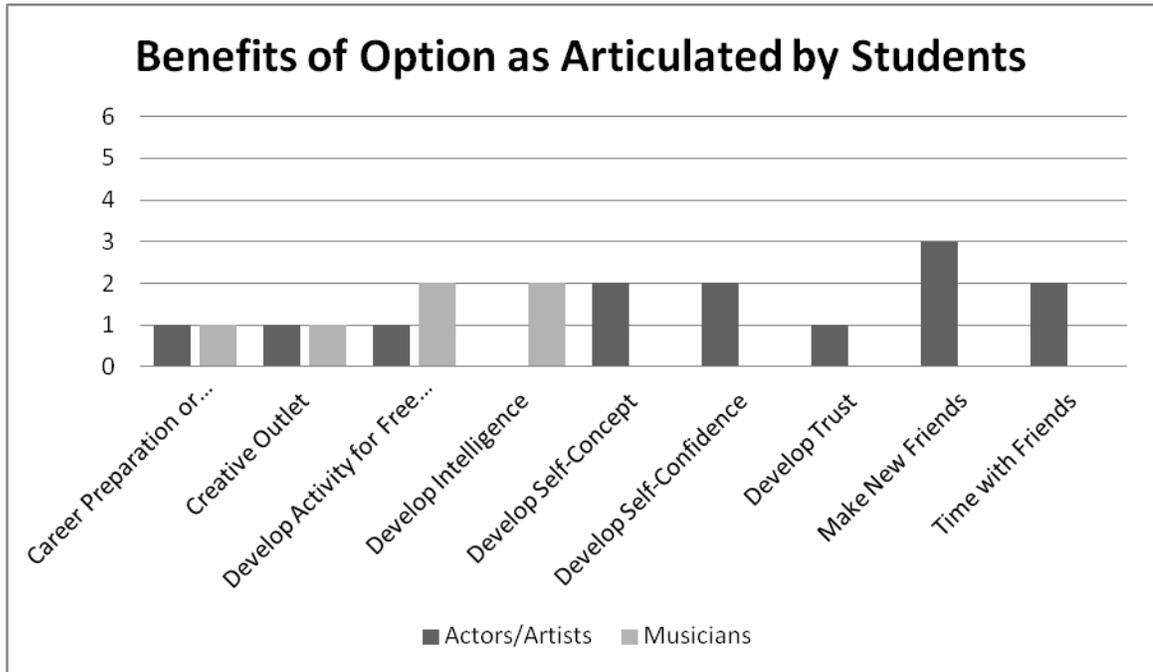


Figure 10. Benefits of options as understood by the student participants.

April and Deborah spoke of developing new self-confidence, Jenna and Emma talked about finding out new things about themselves, Jenna and April found new friends through their drama experience. April learned to trust the people in her drama class, and Deborah thought the things she learned might help her in a career. Ruth and Thaddeus, the artists found different benefits in their option. They spoke to time with friends and the outlet for their creativity. A visual representation of these benefits as perceived by the students is at Figure 10.

The actors and artists articulated an interesting array of benefits from their option of choice. With some prompting, the musicians suggested such benefits as good use of free time, working toward scholarships or careers. Brett, who takes music lessons outside of school, and who also plays in a band outside school, stated,

there are often scholarships ... in music ... and you can like ... it will be with you

for the rest of your life ... so I really choose to do, when I have nothing to do ... you can always pick up your instrument and play it ... and it is for your benefit to try ... or you could take it seriously and take it to a career ... or just play for yourself.

Melanie also alluded to the fact that making music in your own time was a benefit of choosing music.

I can make music, and play piano, and now my clarinet, for people and...I can play music for myself and just write out all my feelings and gather something, I have something into trying out new songs on my instruments.

Fergus was the first to mention the intelligence factor, and his Mother, who was in the kitchen with us at the moment I asked the question about the benefits of music, agreed.

Fergus said,

Music can develop brains and such, things like that. In some ways this was the right choice for me, cause ... like ... it is improving me ... as a musician and as a person ... I guess in some ways I am getting smarter ... band was the right choice.

Sarah said,

well, I heard that it ... like ... it helps with your education and stuff?? With your brain and stuff, and it helps our creativity and that ... yeah I heard about that ... but I didn't really know if it was real or not ... so that didn't really matter to me ... I didn't really think it mattered! I just like music!

Brett and Melanie both see music as a good way to spend some of their free time.

Brett sees music as a career opportunity. Sarah sees music as a creative outlet. Both

Fergus and Sarah had heard that participation in music activities might make them smarter in some way. What Figure 10 cannot show is that Sarah would choose music anyway, whether it makes her smarter or not, she “just likes music!”

The participants’ elementary music educators may struggle with assessment of their students’ progress in their subject, but they definitely do not struggle with sharing what they believe to be the benefits of participating in music. Included here is a sampling of the kinds of things the music educators talk about with their students.

Ms. Stark indicated she has a

poster in my room from a Canadian magazine. It has a picture of the brain and it shows the areas of the brain that are lit when you are listening to music, when you are reacting to music, and of course, what areas of your brain are lit up when you are actually performing music. And I say, not only does it do something for your heart, it actually makes your brain grow, it creates new pathways in your brain.

Ms. Carter also indicated that she talks about the brain. She tells them that

when you do music you are doing so many things at once, but when you are singing and you are playing your instruments and you are doing movement and you are doing more than one thing at a time, it is making your brain work that much harder. I don’t know, it works for them and they get excited about it. I also talk with my choirs about how music is an outlet to deal with emotion that maybe they haven’t even experience yet, or emotions that they are struggling with because often times we keep things that are inside and we don’t have a chance to let them go.

Ms. Andrews said that she talks “about it all the time, because it is my *raison d’être*. Even

with the little kids it expresses things that you can't find words for." Ms. Warner tries to talk about having "an open mind about listening to different cultures of music, different styles of music and studying about them, and to try to have the students not close their minds off to things." Ms. Peters added,

I like to talk with the kids about figuring out what is important for them and how music affects them. The skills that they learn when they are doing music go beyond just the musical skills themselves but the things they learn with they are in the gym when they are working together with people and learning how to cooperate and having a moment of glory but it is not always just about them. I tell them it is about doing something collectively with a group of people and feeling the satisfaction of doing that as well. Because I think that society has become so individualistic, right? And music is a way of bringing people together to really experience that part of it as well. So I talk about what piece of it is going to be part of their life, and keeping their life in balance, as in, don't say no to the arts, don't say no to sports. Keep these things in balance and don't close yourself off from things.

These music educators talk with their students about music as a developer of community, creativity, brain-stimulation and keeping an open mind.

Ms. Warner talked about keeping an open mind. She also talked about the development of independence.

Part of my literacy push is independence. I really push that they have to be able to play recorder on their own, and that is a way to really encourage them towards life-long learning. I say 'once you can read music on your own, and you can come

into the music room and I can have something new on the board and you can read it, and play it, you can choose anything, any other instrument, and you can do it!””

Ms. Carter also added a new idea, that of learning to be creators, producers and makers of music.

I am really trying to get boys in my choir right now, so we talk about how, in our society, we seem to be more consumers of music, and we just plug into our iPods and we use that as our medium. We talk about how we will enjoy it more if we understand how to produce that music and that seems to really help them to sing, the ones that need the reason in the first place. We also talk about the fact that even if they just listen to music in the future, participating in making music now will help them understand more about the music they listen to, music from other cultures, music that expresses someone's feelings.

Ms. Stark spoke to the pleasurable aspect of spending recreation time making music.

I tell my students that I sing in a choir, and I do this in the evening on Thursday nights for 2½ hours, and they ask why I do that, and I say it is because it makes me happy. It is part of my life, and it makes me happy to be part of a group that participates together, so I encourage them. I say ‘the more you know about music, the more you enjoy music and that is a life-long skill.

Ms. Baker reminds her students to continue in music as a means of avoiding future regret.

Well, I talk about regret. I tell them about the people who say to me, ‘you have so much in your life with music, and I regret, regret, regret that I quit.’ I say ‘don't do that. You give it your best shot!

Ms. Andrews talks about building community and learning to work with others.

I tell them that the music room is a good place to be. A place where you learn how to work with others, and support others, and I think that we should mention this as well, that learning how to socialize with others and how to be a part of a goal that goes beyond just the music experience and it is so incredibly important in the middle school when kids are so challenged by the changes in their life.

These music educators consciously and intentionally share with their students the many benefits that the music educators believe that music has in store for them. The band teachers were just as enthusiastic as the elementary music educators when they discussed why offering music to middle years students was important. Mr. Ferris jumped in with

Well, I think our society is changing right now, and I think that we are losing a focus on valuing mastery, and excellence in what we do, and commitment, and I think that in a lot of the other subjects and the other activities that the students do, it is, there is a movement or a desire to move towards learning a wide number of things on the surface level, and never actually learning things deeply and thoroughly and I think that is something that we can do in music. I also think from just an aesthetic value that the importance of music as an expressive tool in our culture is hugely important now, and we need to do everything that we can to educate students not necessarily as musicians, but to become supporters of the arts and appreciators of the arts, whether, that is in music, whether that is in drama, or art, or visual arts, or graphic arts, or all sorts of things, we need to protect this and educate the students as to the value of it when they are being faced with making a choice between something that might be tougher to dig their claws into like

studying the arts and letting technology be the more easily obtained reward.

Ms. Harris and Ms. Norris both agreed with Mr. Findlay. Ms Harris added,

the aspect of community is what we offer that is not offered by the other art forms, well, some other art from offer it, the idea that you can strive for excellence and mastery without stepping on the backs of anyone else, that we all influence each other so that we work to excel and link to each other in a way that is a communication tool certainly that helps to build community and provide a place for students to feel their connection with one another as opposed to their separateness from one another. I think that society is changing to glorify separation, and music is a counterbalance to that.

Then Ms. Norris said,

the community that music helps to create adds to the culture of the school. When we have our art and band camps, in the fall, there was always a performing aspect and so music became part of the culture and the community of the school, and it adds to the broader community as well.

Building community, digging deep in to a subject area, aesthetic education and developing a tool for expression were cited by the band teachers as some of the benefits of music education. The elementary music educators talked about brain work, community, and learning to socialize, working as a group toward a goal. Fergus was the only person who mentioned that music might make him smarter.

Fergus aside, the student participants also shared with the music educators and band teachers the belief that music offered some of these benefits. Jenna remembered as part of her elementary music experience, creating compositions, by herself as a means to

creativity, and also working in groups. She also talked about her outside of school music lessons as giving her goals to reach, and helping her acquire self discipline. Melanie and Brett already use music as a leisure time activity, and Sarah talked about her time in band as being her creative outlet. Brett talked about music as a future occupation. This was the only benefit that the teachers did not mention. Fergus was the only student participant who spoke to music as a means of increasing his intelligence, but he hoped it would.

Satisfaction with Choice Made

The participants in the study had a choice to make when they entered grade seven, between art and band, or from art, band or drama. At the end of grade seven, from our conversations I determined that all are quite happy with their school experience in grade seven in general. I asked specifically if the participants who volunteered for the study were satisfied with the choice of option that they had made.

All of the actors and artists indicated that they had had a good year in grade seven. However, when I asked about their satisfaction with their choice of option, only two of the four students who chose drama were planning to continue in drama. April is happy with her choice of drama and plans to continue. She said, in the future, “I have to get practice with smaller lines and grow, like I have to increase in lines and everything? And learn how to do that.” Jenna also chose drama, and said,

well ... I like it, and I am going to do it again in grade eight. I thought that I was having the same drama teacher which made me more interested in it because I ... that was my favourite teacher. In grade seven I loved the class ... I loved how he taught the class. I am going to stay in drama because ... I don't know ... it is just something that I am interested in.

April had gone into drama hoping it would help her with confidence and social relationships. She told me that indeed these things happened for her and she is happy. Jenna participated in drama outside of school during her elementary years, and now is happy to be participating in drama within her school day.

Emma and Deborah have chosen to leave drama and transfer to art. Emma has “decided to enter art. I have always told myself that I am going into art next year because that is what I excel more at ... and I have also met friends that are from my home room from grade seven and I have gotten really close to them and they are in art as well.”

Deborah has also chosen to go into art because

it is something that I know a lot better ... like I do it all the time, I guess ... and I kind of like it better ... and coming back to class, I see what the art people have done ... they have made pots and drawn pictures and they have sketch books ... and I think ... OH my GOSH ... I want THAT for me, cause it is something that I am used to ... and really, this year, without having art ... I am, like ... LOST, you know, without it.

Emma chose drama because all her friends were choosing art, Deborah’s parents insisted in her taking drama. These girls are now making their own decision, with their parent’s blessing.

Ruth and Thaddeus chose art as their option for grade seven. Ruth told me that she is staying with art because,

I really enjoyed art this year ... we did amazing things ... mosaic tables out of desks ... it was awesome! We had this lounge chair that we covered in newspaper articles and it looks so cool. I don’t think I will ever change my option.

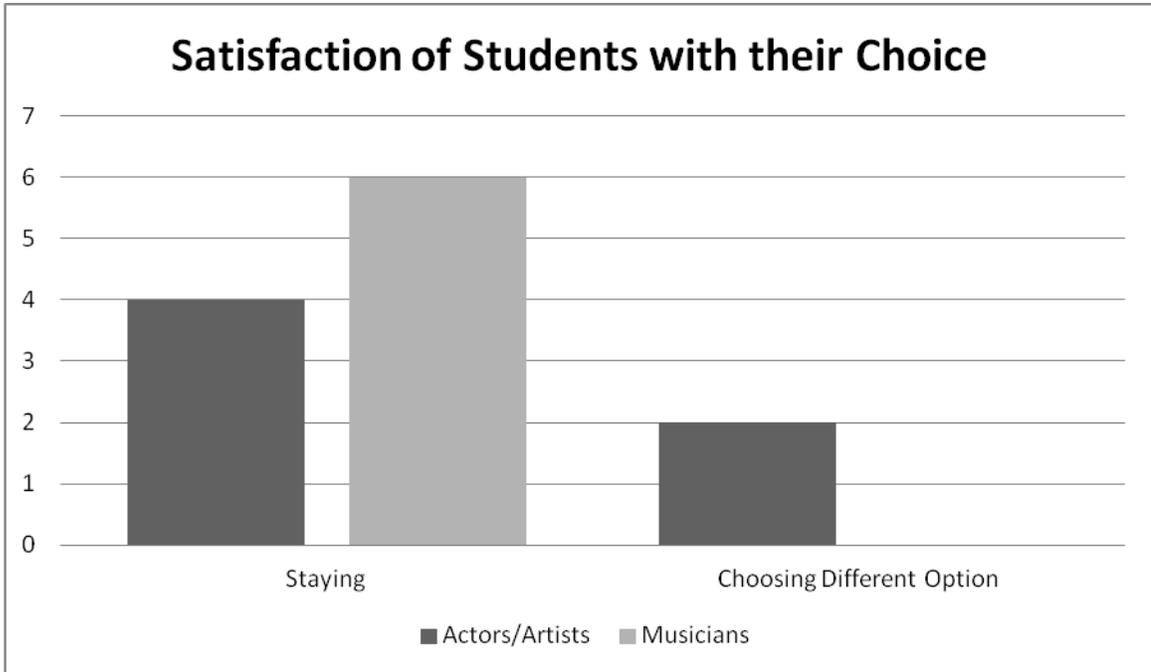


Figure 11. Comparison of the participants’ satisfaction with their option choice.

Thaddeus also enjoyed his time in his option.

It has been good, really good. Art was really fun, because we would have music playing, we would be talking with friends ... working on projects ... it was very strict, but you could still be talking and working. I thought about band and you couldn’t really be doing that because you would be just working on one thing and it felt very structured? Music felt too structured for grade seven. I liked how in art it was just more outgoing ... you could just talk ... the teacher doesn’t say no, don’t talk keep working ... because you do work and you would be talking with friends ... it was, I don’t know ... just felt more friendly in a way.

April, Jenna, Ruth and Thaddeus made their own decisions regarding their option going into grade seven and these four participants in the study are remaining in their option for the following year. Emma chose her option on the basis of her friends’ insistence, and Deborah’s parents insisted that Deborah choose drama. Both these girls will be trying a

different option in grade eight. Figure 11 tells the story visually.

All of the musicians told me that they will continue in band for their grade eight year. The opening statement of this paragraph seems straightforward enough. The stories of the musicians are not straightforward. These students have opinions on teaching, other students and the years farther ahead.

I begin with Melanie, because she was the most succinct. She simply said, “I would still make the same decision ... I really like band!” Brett, who knew in elementary school that his future middle years band teacher is married to a high school band teacher, immediately looked farther ahead, saying,

I know that I am going to (high school) because I know the teachers there and I want to follow all the way through grade 12 with band and uh ... like it wouldn't be so much of a transition to shift cause they (the band teacher at the middle years school) and the band teacher at the high school) teach the same stuff.

Like Brett and Melanie, Sam was happy with his grade seven band experience. He told me,

It was a challenge, it was more difficult than elementary because I had to learn a totally different instrument and there was only one other person learning the same instrument as me, so it wasn't as focused on US as it was on the whole group and there were more people learning, say, clarinet than tuba which is what I was playing. And it was good. And I think, I think, I am going to ... going to, continue in band in high school as well 'cause there are good teachers at my high school. I am looking forward to it.

Like Brett, Sam was looking far ahead. Like Sam, Carrie found band a challenge. She

said,

At the beginning I couldn't really play that well, but I have gotten really good, and also my friend, she played the clarinet with me and she was kind of helping me out, and it was really good, and we got a new band teacher, and he is REALLY funny, so, yeah, for sure, I am going to keep going!

Brett, Carrie, Fergus and Melanie told me that they were continuing in band with no reservations, even though two had found band a real challenge. While Fergus thought band was the right choice for him he also had reservations about the choice for the future.

He said,

I think if I wanted to have more fun ... I would have definitely chosen art ... to have more fun. You get to relax, talk to your friends ... the entire time. In band ... it was very stiff and strict ... where as in art it is very loose and relaxed ... like OK you are to draw a picture of a bird ... hand it in by the end of the class ... and then you just relax and talk with your friends. Meanwhile in band you are 'KAY' ... we are going to start off with a warm-up ... and then immediately we are going to our first piece ... we will practice that ... and then we are doing this rhythm and then we're done and then we're done ... and it was just very much, very much strict strict STRICT!

Later in our conversation, Fergus continued on this theme at length but concluded with "I would love to stay because I think that band ... overall ... is better than art for me."

Sarah also had some reservations about her band class, but they were framed differently from Fergus' reservations. She said,

it was actually, it was really, really good. I want to get all that I have and I want

to get a bunch of stuff done ... and learn as much as I can ... cause you are there to learn. I have to just ignore those kids who waste our time, and I really think that I will still try my best and go ... my furthest. I just really like music ... it is a way to express yourself in a different way other than ... like talking or like screaming your head off ... right? You can make like really aggressive music and you can play really smooth and quite gentle music ... so it is a really good way to express yourself too ... so it is almost kind of like a mix of drama ... and art ... in a way. It is like drama because it has dynamics ... and it is kind of like art because it has like, creative parts and you can just like make it up ... like out of NOWHERE!

Both Fergus and Sarah plan to stay in band for grade eight. Fergus is hoping for a teacher who is less strict, and Sarah is hoping for bandmates with more self-discipline. All of the students who enrolled in band intend to stay in band, at least for the foreseeable future. The student's intentions are shown on Figure 10 as satisfaction with choice made.

Perceptions on Options

As students leave grade six, many are faced with choice regarding their own curriculum for the first time in their school career. I found through talking with the twelve student participants in this study that several factors came into play when they made their decision. I also found that all twelve were happy in their choice of option and that ten will remain with their current choice, for grade eight at least. These students made choices, and they have opinions on having to make the choice regarding options.

I asked the participants what their thoughts were, about having to make choices between courses for grade seven. Emma replied,

that is a hard question. I don't know ... it is a hard decision to make. It is not easy to make that decision. I think that it is good to make our own decisions, but it is hard. If I had listened to my heart, not my friends, I might have had another year of art.

Emma thought that if "we had been able to take two subjects, I would have had drama with my friends and art for my heart." Though directed by her parents into drama, Deborah said,

It was always art for me ... I have always had ... this artistic thing about me. I wanted to do both of them. It would have been a nice option to do both drama and art. I would see them, after drama and they would come back and they would have something in their hands that they have made ... that I would kind of feel like ... aaahhh ... mmaannn ... I didn't get to do that. I wish we all could do that.

Like Emma and Deborah, Jenna took drama and enjoyed drama. Unlike them, she intends to continue in drama, but said

I think in art you learn about different ways to draw, and I am interested in art as well, so I think that I might be missing out on those skills, but I am not sure because I couldn't take it too. It would be good if we could take it, too.

Emma, Deborah and Jenna all took drama, but would have appreciated the opportunity to study both drama and art.

Ruth chose to take art, a decision that was difficult. She said,

Oh, I wanted to be with my friends so much, and (band teacher) had said to us ... he said ... don't do, don't do ... what your friends are doing 'cause THEY'RE doing it ... so I am like ... well ... I am like ... I don't know ... I ... really love

art ... but ... I don't know ... so I am well ... I might as well go with what I KNOW I like! But it was really, really hard to choose between art and band ... like ... I hmmmmed and hawed for months ... I would be up at night trying to decide, cause I LOVE music, I love everything about it, but I also really love art. I really don't think kids should have to make that choice.

Thaddeus also found making the choice a challenge.

It was not a snap decision. It was a slow process ... it was ... I was just thinking OK ... you could do band but you could leave band and go into art ... but you couldn't go from art to band ...unless you had a lot of experience with music. That was part of my decision ... I was thinking well ... I could go in to band and go into art later ... but ... I don't know ...I just chose to go directly in to art. (He is tearing up) It was not an easy decision at all!

Later in our conversation, Thaddeus stated very simply, that “there should be the option of making the choice. If a kid wants to do both, the opportunity should be there, but you shouldn't be forced to both.” April agreed that students “shouldn't have to choose”. She made that statement very quickly and very forcefully, then went on to a suggestion for organizing opportunities to have students make a more informed choice.

All of the actors and artists indicated that there should be two options available and five of them said that they would have preferred to have taken two of the options. Only Thaddeus, for whom this was clearly an emotionally charged topic, did not state that he would have taken two options. The student's wishes are depicted at Figure 12.

The participants who chose music were also asked for their thoughts about having to make course choices going into grade seven. The similarity in responses to those of the

actors and artists is remarkable. Brett said, “you know, I wanted to do art as well ... I really liked art, too.” Later in our conversation, Brett said,

having to choose an option is hard. I sort of just had to ... just choose ... it is still not easy ... it is a hard choice. And art, I could have done art, but it was at lunch ... it was for the full hour ... you only get one lunch hour go hang out with your friends ... so that really wasn't a choice ... it was hard. If art was in the day, I would take that too.

Carrie was skirting the issue, so I asked her more directly that if she had the opportunity to take both art and band, which are the options at her school, would she? Carrie said,

yes, I would ... I think I would try art, because all of the stuff they are doing ... like some of the projects that they are doing are ... I think I would want to do that, they get to take them home. Um ... I think we should still have a choice ... but if they could make both available and we could pick both or just one ... if someone really doesn't want to do something but they have to go to both, that is not really fair.

I did not have to be as direct with Melanie. I asked, “What do you think about making choices for courses in grade seven?” Melanie replied, “I actually wanted to do both art and music. The decision was difficult because I also like art ... like drawing, and painting.” Melanie continued later saying, “It is good to have choice, but it would be good to be able to do both.” Sarah agreed that it is good to have choice, and did not want the taking of two options to be mandatory, for the teachers' sake. She said,

If you were, like, starting off in art and drama ... you might not know anything (in art or drama) so it might be a little convoluted for the teacher ... a little chaotic.

BUT, if you WANT do band drama, that should be a choice.

Fergus agreed that there should be choice, and Sam, who describe himself as a musician, simply said, “Well, having choice is good, cause if there was no music, well.....”

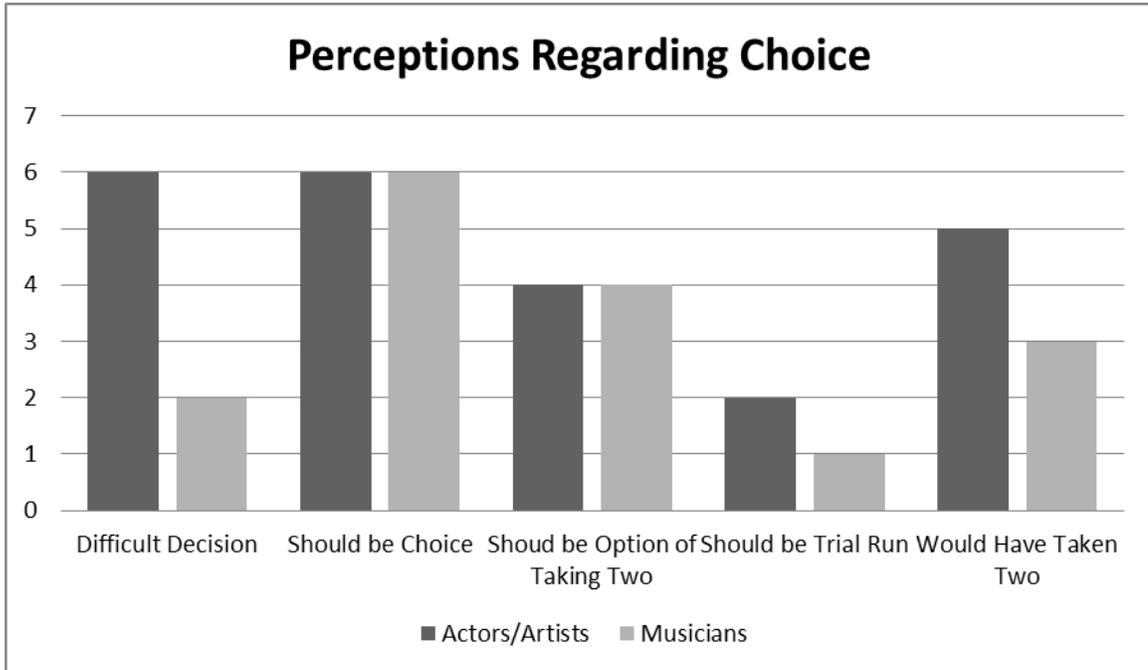


Figure 12. Perceptions of the participants regarding choice.

All of the musicians saw choice as important. Brett and Melanie found the choice difficult and Brett, Carrie and Melanie indicated that, had they the opportunity, they would have taken two options. Sam was worried that if there was no choice, there may not be music. The wishes of the musicians are combined with the wishes of the actors and artists at Figure 12.

The elementary music educators were quite willing to share their thoughts on the fact that students have to make curricular choices as they enter grade seven and expressed the same sentiments around the choice of options as the student participants. When I broached the subject of the choices that students need to make as they enter grade seven, to a person, the focus group sat up straighter. Ms Andrews was the first to speak, and she

spoke forcefully.

The minute I hear, that students have to choose amongst the arts, I get angry ... because they are too young ... to have to stream ... they need to experience all of the arts equally. If they are strong in one of those areas they are quite likely going to be strong in the other two, and it irks me that we make our students choose at such a young age. We stream them, where we don't stream them in the classroom according to their likes or their abilities and I can't get my head around that we do that in the arts, and that is what comes to mind when we talk about choice.

Ms. Baker immediately added, "Oh, I do agree with what you (Ms Andrews) say, I think for the students that they feel that choice is important because then they get a say in what they are doing." Ms. Warner said,

I think children in that age are fighting for their independence and they are fighting for more rights when they go through that time period, so, I think it is important for them to have that choice. I really wish that they could choose two, even if it would make the day longer somehow and even if they had to come early or stay later. There should still be that choice offered, for extra credit or whatever, it would be nice if they could change the schedule somehow, it doesn't have to be so RIGID!

Ms Peters agreed that "choice is important at that age, and some of them do have some very strong skills already," and went on to say that,

They know that art is their thing, or they know that music is their thing. I have one student from this year who chose to go into drama next year, and I am sad that he is not doing band because he is very, very musical, but he is excellent on

stage too, so you know, it's got to be a struggle for them to have to pick, when they've got gifts in more than one of these areas and I think maybe our whole education system needs a bit of an overhaul with more choice in other areas as well.

Ms Lerner agreed that “kids like to have some power, some decision making on their own.” She also agreed with Ms. Andrews, that it is too early in their school careers for them to make that choice.

I know a lot of people who are now my age who didn't choose band, and didn't go that route and now they wish they had. It is a life decision, really, if you think about it, so it is kind of unfair that, at such a young age, they might be cut off from the school music experience. It is so important to keep music as an option in the middle school because there are lots of students who are not taking lessons outside school, and the important thing for me is that they have the opportunity.

Ms. Carter said, “I think it is important for them to do something whether it is band, whether it is choir, I think they should do something in music!” She added that she is “really impressed and proud of our division for caring about, and thinking about all of the activities going on in the middle years, and offering a variety of options to our students.”

Ms. Stark summed up the conversation with the elementary music educators when she said, “We all agree. They should not have to choose. They should be able to enroll for at least two arts options.” Neither the student participants, nor the elementary school music educators thought that student should have to choose between the arts for grade seven.

The comments of the band teachers showed that they agreed with the students and

the elementary music educators. Mr. Findlay said,

I do not believe that students should have to choose between the arts. I think our school had a really good way of dealing with this issue, when we offered the lunch time art class four times a cycle, and they could do that AND register for band, and they would get both those experiences in grade seven and eight.

Ms. Harris agreed, succinctly stating, “students should not have to choose between the arts,” then, later said, “I think that having to take an option over the lunch hour when other students have a break, that just devalues the option.” Ms. Norris would “prefer that they did not have to choose.”

None of the band teachers thought that students should have to choose. They agreed with the elementary music teachers and the student participants that students should not have to choose between or from options. Ms. Carter and Ms. Baker, of the elementary music educators, raised the issue of the students not having the benefit of fully informed choice. The band teachers also observed that the other options do not get the same attention as band when information is being given to students regarding their options.

These band teachers were quite cognizant in recognizing that other choices might be right for students. The band teachers also thought that students may not get all of the information that they need in terms of making the choice. Ms. Harris noted that she often feels like she is

the only teacher at my school that goes to the feeder school besides, perhaps the guidance counselor or the resource teacher, because they meet about the students that they are receiving, but in terms of classroom teachers, or other specialists

like the art teacher or other people going, visibly going down to that school, it hasn't happened.

Ms. Harris' observation was noted by the students. Only one of the students noted that she received information from a guidance counselor. The students and elementary music educators were aware that the students received much information from band teachers on school visits and at instrument try-out events. Students did get some information regarding art on school tours, but no art or drama teachers from middle years schools visited their grade six classroom in the spring around decision making time. The reader may recall also that while art instruction was timetabled in the student's elementary school experience, there was not necessarily an art specialist in charge of the programme. Drama was an extracurricular programme in all schools, without timetabled instruction in that art discipline. This information led to a cautionary note and a further exploration of the preparation of the grade six students for grade seven.

A Cautionary Note

Ms. Carter brought an issue to the focus group that she raised again and again. She said,

It is interesting when I talk to our students, just to hear what the reasoning was behind the choice that they make. I think they do take it very seriously and it is a choice that is hard for them. It has been kind of interesting for me to watch the dynamic that is starting to happen now with this new band teacher sort of pressuring the students to stay in band. I am interested to see what effect that is going to have on that programme over the next few years. I think it is heartbreaking, actually. When students come to tell me that 'I have told (band

teacher) that I don't want to do band and he keeps bugging me about it, and he's mad at me'. The art teacher in our school as well, has a lot of students coming to her about it, so I am not sure where that is going to go. It is something that I struggle with right now very much. We want our children to be confident in their music and art, and they are not sure, and that pressure, causes...problems for students. It is very important that encouraging is different from forcing and pressure.

Before I met with the elementary music educators, Sarah had already raised this issue. Coupled with the information that there was no information from art or drama teachers, and that there was no formal drama education in her school, her concern was that students may feel like they are letting an adult down if the student does not choose what the adult is encouraging them to do. I write again what Ms. Lerner said. "I would say in the end it is the respect for the child and you respect what the child has to say is the most important thing so we have to have our discussions with our kids in a respectful way."

Preparation for Grade Seven Revisited

From my conversations with these students, I found that only two of the twelve participants are going to change their option for grade eight. I also found that eight of the students would have taken two arts options had they been available, and eight of the students said that the decision regarding their option for grade seven was a difficult decision to make. Ruth told me she was awake at night thinking about this. I felt that the preparation for their choices warranted further discussion. This discussion took different forms with each of the participants.

When asked if she recalled if any of her elementary teachers had helped with her

choice of option, April said,

I don't think so, they only like told us what it is about ... like the said that the teachers were going to be really hard on us in grade seven, and it is going to be our worst year and everything ... but not why, or what the courses were. We knew that there had to have been music or something ... and everybody knew that there had to be art ... like ... but nobody knew that was like there was gonna be like ... THREE choices like even drama ... nobody ... like most people didn't think there was going to BE drama or anything.

April also said,

I think that they should ... have it before school starts (the school year), and they should have sessions like a day to have three sessions ... one should be for art, one should be for drama ... one should be for band, and see what it is like ... because I don't think ... cause ... if somebody picks ... like ... art, and then in the middle of the year, they want to do band or drama ... or something ... I think that we should let them switch, because ... um ... when you go to art ... it is REALLY simple ... like you, you are naming the colours ... and everything ... I know cause all my friends do art ... and then like ... try out each one and pick which one they liked the best.

Emma wasn't really sure how drama or art would 'run' in her middle school. "I knew from the band teacher's visit, how band would run ... but nobody told us what art would be like ... yeah ... I might have had another year of art!" Deborah also noticed an absence of information. She said,

I think to have the other teachers from the other two courses ... come to talk to us

... like when we had the band teacher come ... it kind of opened up our eyes to the band experience ... but no one really came about art or drama to tell us what we were going to be doing ... and ... like what it was all going to be about ... so ... no one knew what to pick ... so the majority of the class went into band ... 'cause they knew what they were going into ... but ... uh ... I know a lot of us were kind of like ... well ... we still really want to go into art, but we don't know what we are doing ... so ... it would have been helpful to have an explanation of what we were getting into.

Jenna also found information lacking. She agreed with Deborah and said,

The art and drama teachers didn't come to our school ... so we could meet them ... I could have ... it might have ... influenced my thinking and my decision a little bit more, if I had known what teacher I would be having ... cause all I met was the band teacher, and I didn't exactly know what he would be like, but I knew what he would be teaching. I believe that we got to try out a few instruments for band, but ... I don't know ... I don't know ... I think if we could have met the other teachers ... or I could have known what would be happening in their classrooms and that would help, I think.

Ruth found she was not fully informed about the policy that students could transfer out of band after grade seven. She discovered that detail too late in the decision making process to fully inform her decision. She said, "I wish maybe I had known that if I didn't like band in grade seven that I could have switched for grade eight." Thaddeus shared that he thought,

there was probably more that could be happening , because (the former band

teacher) left, so people in band didn't meet (the new band teacher) ... we have a new band teacher, and, I don't know ... maybe ... I am pretty sure that when we got to go to the band room ... (the former band teacher) knew that he was leaving and they probably could have brought in (the new band teacher) and he could have met the kids ... I don't remember that happening at all.

Each of the actors and artists said that they could have used more information about their options. April suggested a scheme for giving each student an opportunity to try each option before they chose their option for grade seven. Thaddeus thought that meeting a new specialist was an important part of the decision making process. These students all suggested that more information is necessary for students in grade six to make informed choices.

Like the actors and artists, the musicians thought that their decisions could have been more informed. Brett, who had encouragement from his elementary school music teacher, and who knew who his band teachers would be in grade seven and beyond, said,

I really think that a lot of people just follow what their friends are doing ... not what they really want to do. It's still not easy, it is a hard choice, and nobody really knows what art is going to be like in grade seven, not in grade six anyways... nobody tells us.

Fergus would have liked to have had a heads up on the seriousness of the band programme, He would also like to have had more information on the structure of the courses that were available to him. He said,

I had NO clue which would be more strict ... band or art. I had done music and I had no idea how strict band would be. Uhm ... I also didn't know ... apparently

there was ... we could have ... there was almost no tests in art. They sort of just graded you on you art work???? Or something like that ... I am just trying to think of the word that applies here ... project work. I guess I could have asked some older kids. Some ... like grade nines ... like what have you preferred ... what is better? What did people enjoy more ... thinks like that. Teachers could have told us ... they could have ... but ... I guess it is kind of difficult to go to lit to (band teacher) and say ...HIYA! Would you just describe your class as fun, sort of fun ... or not fun at all!?”

Sarah was more serious than Fergus about this issue and said,

I think that we are getting a little bit less (information) than what we need ... cause like, I think it would be good if, like, the drama teacher and the art teacher came in too? So then they could, like, tell the kids what THEY do or how to prepare for it if they have to ... or something like that ... just like ... explain what you are going to be doing ... most of the time.

Sarah and April both suggested hands on trials of each of the options. Sarah suggested that

you could do ...like a week tryout...like for each thing That could be cool ... so you would like ... get experience and then actually finally choose ... if you like which one better from the experience ... so then you would KNOW what was going on.

Sam did have a brief “hands on” experience of the options during his tour, but still agreed with those who determined that there was not enough information to make an informed choice. Sam told me,

I do remember going to (middle years school) on a field trip in grade six, and we learned about the meetings and all the different activities at recess and we ... um ... were told a little bit about band, but not too much, and a little bit about art ... we met the art teacher ... and we met the band teacher but I think that was all we learned about the two choices. We really didn't learn much about band or art.

Brett, Fergus, Sam and Sarah all said that more information would have been helpful for their decision making about their options.

Melanie and Carrie were satisfied with the information that they received.

Melanie reiterated that the band teacher visited, and that was enough for her. She said, "... my band teacher in junior high ... um ... he came to our elementary ... he told us a lot about band, and what we were going to do that year ... that was enough for me."

Carrie, who attends school in a K-9 setting, told me,

... we got tons of information, like there was a note from (the principal) ... there was a note from (the band teacher). And from (the new band teacher) ... so yeah ... I think that we got lots of information. I don't think there was anything that we did not know.

Four of the musicians wanted more information. The two musicians who thought they had all the information that they needed were in band, were happy in band and referred only to information that they received regarding band during their grade six year. I wonder if their responses might have been different if they were not happy in band.

Ten of the twelve participants told me that more information would be useful to them in making their decision regarding their options for grade seven. The two participants who said that the information they received was adequate were happy with

the choice that they had made. The ten participants who wanted more information had several ideas for the delivery of that information.

From the elementary music educators, I found that they agree that there are holes and discrepancies in the information that the students receive about their grade seven options. The music educators were well aware that, not only were there no drama teachers in their buildings, no drama teacher came to any of their elementary schools to talk about drama programmes in the middle years. These music educators also mentioned that while their students did receive art education, no art teacher informed the grade six students about middle years art, with the exception of Ms. Lerner's experience in one of her schools, where the grade six home room teacher is also the art specialist for the middle years, and in Ms. Stark's school. Ms. Stark said, "We have a grade six teacher who is an artist, and those children have an understanding of what art will be like, but for drama? No!" There was concern expressed by the elementary music educators about the inconsistent presentations regarding band programmes as well. Ms. Lerner and Ms. Andrews drew our attention to the fact that not all middle years band teachers are as effective in educating the grade six students as were the focus group band teachers. Ms. Lerner worried that at one school, the concert by the middle years band might turn her students away from music, due to the quality of the performance, and Ms. Andrews mentioned that her school only gets a concert by the middle years band in years when enrolment has dropped in band. I remind the reader that four of the participants who chose music were from schools where two of the members of the band teachers' focus group work.

There was concern generally about the inconsistent nature of the dissemination of

information to the grade six students in this division about their options in grade seven.

Two elementary music teachers summed this up. In one of her schools, Ms. Lerner stated that, “they get a whole lot of nothing from anybody. I know the teachers hand out the form that the kids have to check off. That is about all they get from that one.” Ms.

Warner worried about the information her students get as well. “My principal? Not a word! Guidance counsellor? Not a word!” Because the band teachers could only comment upon what they do for their incoming grade six students, their opinions about the general information that grade six students get is not included here, but their colleagues in the elementary schools are concerned about the quality, content and amount of information that grade six students receive about their grade seven options.

The student participants, for the most part, thought that they might have benefitted from more information about grade seven and their options than they received. Their elementary music teachers say that the dissemination of this information is inconsistent across the division, and even within schools. The elementary music educators are well aware that the students are receiving more information about one option than they are about others. The band teachers confirmed that where there feeder schools are concerned, the grade six students receive much information regarding the band programmes. The student participants, music educators and band teachers agree that there are discrepancies and holes in the information that grade six students receive regarding their options in grade seven.

The findings from this study revealed more information than the answers to the research questions. The findings described the participants and placed the participants in their settings. The findings did speak to why students choose music and why they do not,

and determined how the participants felt about having options. Qualitative research often leads to discoveries not outlined in the research questions, and the findings from this study also speak to how the students found out about their options, and their beliefs about the benefits of those options, and how they felt about the options that they chose. The conclusions regarding all of these findings, along with recommendations for further study, follow.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

The purpose of this study was to find out from the perspectives of students and teachers, why some students choose music as their option for grade seven, why some students do not choose music as an option for grade seven, and to determine students' perspectives on those course options. Twelve student participants, six who chose music for grade seven and six who did not choose music for grade seven shared their thoughts on this subject with me. Seven elementary music educators and three band teachers took part in focus groups to discuss the same subject.

The Participants

Information shared by the students in our interviews suggested that all of the students who offered their time to this study have adjusted to grade seven well. They are engaged in school life, and in life outside school. They had similar elementary school experiences in regard to drama and music education. There were differences in their art experiences, some having had an art specialist, some not, but for all there were scheduled art classes in their elementary schools. Four of the participants had art, drama and music as their option choices for grade seven. Eight of the participants were limited to a choice between band and art.

Student Perspectives on their Course Options as they Enter Grade Seven

All of the student and teacher participants agreed that it was important for students to have choice regarding options. They also agreed, as Schwartz (2005) stated, that the choice between or amongst options is difficult. The twelve student participants were unanimous that the decision of which option to take was a hard decision. This may have been made more difficult for them in that the array of options that Schwartz says

needs to be part of the decision making process was not clear to all of the participants. Neither were the consequences of the options clear to these students.

Along with the teacher participants, the students agreed that they should not have to choose between options. Having all agreed that students should not have to choose between or amongst options, nine of the students said that they would have taken a second option had two options been a possibility. Five actors and artists would have taken two options. Four would have taken both art and drama, and one would have taken art and band. The four band students who would take a second option named art as the second option. One would have taken band instead of art had she known that she could transfer to art after grade seven. These students found choosing difficult and some would have taken two arts courses had that opportunity been available.

All participants agreed that the choice of option was a difficult choice to make. All participants agreed that students should have the opportunity to participate in two options. The student and teacher participants also agreed that it should not be mandatory that students take two arts subjects. Nine of the twelve student participants indicated that they would take the opportunity to study two arts options. The participants agreed that the opportunity to choose needs to remain intact.

The choice of option is a difficult one, yet all of the students feel it is important to have choice regarding options for grade seven. These students would like the option of studying two arts options, but they do not want that scenario to be mandatory for all.

Factors that Encourage Students to Choose Music as an Option for Grade Seven

The students who chose music for grade seven, chose to participate in music based upon their passion and their skill set. Words such as “fun”, “enjoy”, “love” in

conjunction with music and their choice of option attest to their passion for this subject. Whether they have found Csikszentmihalyi's (1993) 'flow', or Robinson's (2009) 'element', the musicians clearly find making music enjoyable.

All of the musicians also stated that they felt that their capability in musical skills gave them a foundation for success in band. Olszewski-Kubillus and Yasumoto (1994) found that ability was a factor in the choice of gifted students in the area of mathematics. Cheung (2006) found that grades in the different sciences were determining factors in girls' choices of a science stream. Kinney (2010) found that academic achievement might be a factor in students' participation in band. The participants in this study chose music for grade seven, in part, because of their self-efficacy in music.

All the musicians mentioned that they had parental support for their choice. Cheung (2006) found that parental opinion regarding girls' choices of science specialty was a factor in the girls' choice of a science specialty. Olszewski-Kubillus and Yasumoto (1994) also found that parents' attitudes toward the importance of a subject were a factor in the choice of an advanced mathematics course by their children. There was parental support for all of the musicians in their choice of band.

Four of the six mentioned that they had friends that had chosen band as well. Adams and Gulotta (1989) describe four social groups with which adolescents can associate. Those groups can form a frame of reference within which adolescents make choices. Four of the musicians had found a social group that supported their interest in music and who went along with them to grade seven band.

All the musicians said that they would have chosen band regardless of other factors. Ken Robinson (2009) contends that given the opportunity, people find their

'element'. It appears that these students have found theirs. Passion and a related set of skills were the most salient reasons for choosing music. All of the students who chose band are remaining in music for the foreseeable future.

Factors that Discourage Students from Choosing Music as an Option for Grade Seven

The two factors that encouraged students to continue in music study for grade seven were the same factors that steered the students who chose art and drama away from music to other options. The six students who chose art and drama were asked why they did not choose music. Perceived difficulty with musical skills and passion for a different art form directed the choice of these participants away from music. Each of the six student participants who chose art or drama indicated that they did not feel that they had the musical skills necessary to be successful in band. Corenblum and Marshall (1998) found that teacher rating of band students factored into the decision of band students to continue or not continue in music. The students in this study believed that their perceived lack of musical literacy precluded them from taking music. Their interests took them elsewhere.

Passion in the context of the actors and artists requires explanation. Of the four students who chose drama, two chose on the basis of interest. Of these two, one chose drama because she had expectations that drama would develop her self-confidence and public speaking ability. The other chose drama because she had outside of school drama experience and enjoyed it. Two others that chose drama expressed the thought that they would have preferred to take art but chose drama based on the opinions of others. One of the students chose drama because her parents insisted on that choice, and one chose

drama based upon the opinion of her friends. The four students who chose drama or art based upon their interest in the area are remaining in their chosen option for grade eight. The two who made the choice based upon the insistence or encouragement of others are switching to the option where their heart lies. A perceived lack of skill in music and an articulated interest in another art form were key factors when choosing an option other than music.

Explaining the Phenomenon

From the results of this study, it seems that students chose their option based on passion, flow, or a feeling of being in their ‘element’. When not sure, peers swayed or parents insisted. The students who chose music told me that their decision rested upon which option was where they found fun. This coincides with Robinson’s (2009) idea of finding one’s ‘element’. The musicians also noted that they believed that they possessed a good musical skill set. All of these students had the support of their parents in their choice, and there was the added benefit that their friends went along with them into band. Two of the actors and artists chose based on passion, or their ‘element’, two were influenced by friends, one was based on parental insistence, and one because she saw a benefit specific to her own learning. One of the students influenced by peers and the student who took their option based on parental decision are both transferring to their option of passion for grade eight.

Self-efficacy in music was a factor in choosing to take music, and in choosing against it. Each of the students who chose music as an option said that they felt that they had the necessary musical skills to be successful in a band programme. Five of the students who did not choose music said that they did not feel that they had the music

skills to be successful in band, and the sixth said that her learning style was not conducive to learning in a group.

Assessment and reporting practices were mentioned by both the actors and artists and the musicians. At the grade six level, they offered the opinion that some students might base their decision for grade seven options on a comment or mark on a report card. They also indicated that in some arts subject areas they were not clear upon what they were being assessed. The elementary music educators spoke to this issue and indicated that assessment and reporting for clarity of the assessment is a requirement of their profession with which they struggle. Smithrim (2000) outlines many of the pitfalls of assessment and reporting in the arts, one of which is the student understanding, or misunderstanding of the content of the report. Another of the pitfalls Smithrim outlines is the notion that reporting does not necessarily tell the full story. The students wondered about making decisions on information that might not be relevant to their options in grade seven.

Student participants spoke of having specialists for music, and some spoke of having a specialist for art. All had specific time in their timetables for music and art in elementary school. None had timetabled instruction in drama, though most had the opportunity to participate in drama as a school extra-curricular activity. These perceptions were confirmed by the music educators. The four participants for whom drama was an option wondered how other students would know about drama, and how it was possible to choose intelligently. These students did not have access to full knowledge of Schwartz's (2005) array of options.

The participants received information about grade seven through grade six, and

received information about their options in the spring of grade six. They related all of the recruiting tactics used by band teachers, including spring visits to elementary schools by the band teacher. Art educators, drama educators, guidance counselors and principals did not have a hand in disseminating information regarding options, unless the participants met the drama or art teacher on a tour of the middle years school. The participants received forms sometime in the spring, but none of the participants, student or adult, could tell me if these were registration forms were for middle years school in general, or for their options, or arts options, in particular. The forms came to the students in a variety of ways, and at different times, some from home room teachers, some from band teachers, some before the band teachers' spring visit, some after. The dissemination of information regarding options for grade six students was inconsistent, incomplete and slanted toward band.

It might be safe to say that, given good instruction, good perception of skill set and parental support, students at the grade six level will choose their options for grade seven based on where their passion, flow, their 'element' lies. Given the opportunity, these students will take two arts options.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Several implications and recommendations for practice emerge from this study. These include recommendations regarding information for students, course offerings and curricular practices.

Student and teacher participants agree that information for grade six students regarding their options for grade seven is inconsistent across the division and may be incomplete. Middle years educators in the school division, particularly those who work

with students in grade six and grade seven should work together to develop policies and procedures around the dissemination of information regarding options for students in grade six and their parents. Art and drama educators particularly should be part of this process. Development of a strategy for the dissemination of information to students and their parents that includes information on visual art and drama would give a greater number of students the possibility of making an informed choice.

Students and teachers indicated that students should not have to choose amongst the arts. The participants in this study indicated that students should have the option of studying in two arts disciplines. The school system should respond to this desire. School leaders should develop school policies that ensure that those students who want to continue study in two arts areas are afforded that opportunity. Furthermore, it is clear that there are differences in the ways in which the various arts options meet the diverse socio-emotional and artistic needs of students. Schools should continue to offer a broad range of arts course options for students at the middle years level.

Curricular implications emerged from this study as well. Clearly, skill development is important to students as relevant information in their choice making. The school division should evaluate the music, art and drama programmes in its elementary schools to ensure adequate skill acquisition by students in all arts areas available for study in grade seven. Currently, music education in the division has the advantage of specialists and timetabling of the discipline, yet six student participants in this study did not feel confident enough in their musical literacy to continue in music study in grade seven. Skill acquisition aside, students are being asked to choose from art, band and drama, when the students have not had instruction in drama. Clearly there are some

curricular areas to address.

The six students who did not choose music were all from schools where there had been staff turnover in their elementary music setting, or, as in the case of Ruth, the student had moved often and thus had had a variety of music education experiences. None of these students felt confident in their musical abilities. Ms. Norris and Ms. Lerner spoke to the situation that specialists in part time positions often look for positions where they can spend more time in one school, thus staff turnover in small schools is a fact of life. If the school division wants consistency for its students, policies should be developed to create, where possible, full time positions where arts specialists are assigned more than one subject area.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study raised new questions as well as answered some. Noted here are some recommendations for further study.

Of twelve participants in this study, ten chose their option based on their interest and passion for the art form. Robinson (2009) says for people to find their ‘element’, they have to have natural facility, affinity, attitude and opportunity. In this school division, the students in elementary schools have much opportunity in music, some opportunity in art, but are lacking in opportunity in drama. None of the student or teacher participants articulated that there was instruction in drama in the curriculum of the elementary schools. A question that might be asked in further research is “How would student choice be impacted by opportunities to experience focused drama education programmes in elementary school?”

Skill in music was a factor for the actors and artists in choosing an option other

than music. Self-efficacy was also a factor in the choice made by the musicians. The musicians felt confident in their music skills. The actors and artists did not. A suggestion for research might be “how can elementary music educators ensure that their students have the necessary musical skill set to ensure student confidence in their own music skills?” Another might be, “is there a disconnect between students’ understanding of their musical skill, and their actual musical skill set?”

Assessment and reporting practices were mentioned as a concern by the student actors, artists, and musicians as well as teacher participants. Grades were a factor in the choice of science stream in Cheung’s (2006) study, and assessment was cited as a factor in Corenblum and Marshall’s (1998) study on student retention in band programmes. At the grade six level, these students understood that assessment was important to decision making and also understood that there was ambiguity in their experience with assessment and reporting. Further work might be done in the area of assessment and reporting for clarity for students. Work might also be done in the area of how students relate assessment information to their curricular choices.

Finally, the issue of staff turnover as it relates to student success or achievement in music might be studied. Kinney (2010) noted that mobility was a factor in students remaining in band. Perhaps it is not the student moving, but the change in instructor that is the factor. Researchers might compare the level of confidence exhibited by students in their musical skills and their interest in music in schools with specialists who have long tenure and schools that have had high staff turnover. To what extent does the opportunity for a sustained relationship with an arts teacher impact a student’s relationship with a particular arts discipline?

This study was most interesting to me. The results are limited in that they are based on the input of twelve students, all of whom bear the same demographics. This was a small, self-selected sample. All information necessary is included here for another researcher to determine what different students in different contexts, different geographic and socioeconomic areas have to say about why some students choose music, why some students do not, and how they feel about having to choose.

My own children, now in their late twenties, still cannot or will not tell me why they did not choose to continue in school music study after grade nine. I still have many questions that I would appreciate answers for. I do know now, that students in this study did choose music based on their passion, and confidence in having an accompanying skill set. My mission now is to ensure that each child in my care has that accompanying skill set. If I do this, my students will have the confidence needed to choose an option based upon their passion. They will not have doors closed to them because of a lack of skills.

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An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix A: Informed Consent for Superintendent



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Title of Research Study: An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Student Researcher and Contact information: Dianne Sjoberg, 403 Southport Boulevard, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0A8, (204) 885-0700 (telephone); dsjoberg@mymts.net (email)

Research Supervision: Dr. Francine Morin, Room 230 Education, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2, (204) 474-9054 (telephone); fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca (email)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Focus and Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this qualitative research study is to determine reasons for certain curricular choices when subject options, particularly music education choices, are available to students in grade seven in a particular urban school division. The goals of the study are to determine the factors that encourage students to choose music as an option in grade seven and the factors that discourage students from choosing music as an option in grade seven. The study will attempt to answer the questions:

- i. why do some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why do some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?

Research Procedures: Six participants who are enrolled in a music programme in grade seven, and six participants who are not enrolled in a music education programme in grade seven will spend one hour each with the researcher in conversation regarding their school music experience, their extracurricular music experience and their family's involvement

in music. They will be asked what information they had in the spring of grade six regarding their optional courses for grade seven. They will also be asked how and why they made their decision regarding the option that they chose.

Students who are currently in grade seven in Pembina Trails School Division will be informed by their music educator, or another professional in their school building of the project in process. Students indicating an interest in giving an hour of their time to the project will be given a package of information addressed to their parents/guardians. This package will include:

- i. Participant information
- ii. Parent information
- iii. Parent consent and student assent form

These conversations will be held at the students' school, before or after school or at the noon hour by mutual agreement of the researcher and participant. The conversations may take place over the summer in which case the location and time will be mutually agreed upon by the student, the student's guardians, and the researcher.

These conversations will be recorded with a Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber, then transcribed and analyzed using qualitative techniques. The results of this analysis will be triangulated with the analyses of the focus group conversations to confirm the findings.

Elementary music educators from Pembina Trails School Division will be asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the elementary school educators' perceptions of the elementary school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this groups' knowledge of the music programme in the school that the music educators' students will enter in grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes.

Middle years music educators in Pembina Trails School Division will be asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the middle years school educators' perceptions of the middle years' school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum, methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this group's knowledge of the music programme in the school or schools that the music educators' students come from before grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes, what information is disseminated to feeder schools regarding the options available in grade seven, whether recruitment is intentionally undertaken and if so, how.

The two focus groups will be recorded with both video (Sony Camcorder) and audio (Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber) devices, then transcribed and analyzed. Video recording is important in this setting for transcription accuracy and to ensure data are not lost. Having participants identify themselves prior to each opportunity to speak interrupts the flow and authenticity of conversation, and that personal identification step is not fully guaranteed in the throes of a conversation, therefore audio recording alone cannot be guaranteed to approach accuracy as to attribution of comments. While video recording does not guarantee accuracy, the possibility is greater than with audio recording alone. The results of this analysis will be referenced with the analyses of the face-to-face interview to confirm the findings.

Deception, Risks and Benefits: There will be no deception used in this study. There are no risks to the student participants in the study. By virtue of the fact that the participants are interested enough to take part in such a study, the results of the study may become part of the student's conversations with parents and others. There are no risks to the adult participants in the study. Benefits may include a professional conversation with their colleagues, new knowledge of professional practices of their colleagues and a new awareness of issues surrounding the choosing of options by their students.

Pembina Trails School Division has, in place, well developed policies and procedures regarding the revelation of emotionally charged circumstances or child abuse to a division employee. The researcher, as an employee of Pembina Trails School Division would be guided by those policies and procedures should any abuse be revealed during any interview.

Benefits to both student and adult participants in the study may or may not include light refreshments, dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the scheduling of the interviews or the focus groups.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Pseudonyms will be assigned to the participants and will be used in any transcription, analysis and report. Should the name of the participants or the school, or school division be mentioned in the interview, they will not be used in the transcription. Any written transcriptions or notes will be stored on a password protected computer. All data, including hard copies of transcriptions and notes and interview tapes, will be kept in a locked, secure cabinet in my home. **No recording, audio or visual, in whole or in part, shall be used in any presentation of the thesis. If a direct quotation from a transcription is used in the writing of the thesis, sentence structure will be such that the quotation cannot be attributed to the speaker, or a pseudonym will be used. An example of the use of sentence structure that would protect the anonymity of the speaker might be, "One of the grade seven students said" or "An elementary music educator expressed this idea by saying".** Tapes, both audio and video, will be destroyed upon completion of the project and my thesis defense. The interview data will be kept with the intent and consent forms. A copy of the summary of the study will be delivered to the participants through the school mail system, or via Canada Post.

Compensation: There is no compensation or remuneration for the interviews or focus groups. Circumstances of interview appointments and focus group settings may present the opportunity to offer light refreshments to the participants.

Feedback and Debriefing: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same.

How to Withdraw: Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, via phone call or email or letter to the researcher, or by indicating verbally during a conversation of their wish to withdraw. The participant may also choose at any time in a conversation to decline to answer a question, or comment on a topic at hand. The participants may withdraw from the study after the conclusion of the interview by contacting the researcher within two weeks after the conclusion of the interview.

Dissemination of Results: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same. Copies of the thesis will be used by the faculty advisor and thesis committee for assessment of the work. The thesis will be used as the basis for an article for a professional music educators' journal. Because pseudonyms will be used throughout the process of and the writing of the thesis, the participants' right to confidentiality is intact.

Destruction of Data: Pursuant to completion of the project and the defense of the thesis, any hard copies of transcriptions or research notes will be shredded. Video and audio tapes will be destroyed. Electronic copies of the thesis will be held in a password protected computers

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to allow this research to occur in Pembina Trails School Division. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering questions they prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Participants' continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent, so they, and the school division, should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout participation in the study.

The University of Manitoba Ethics Board and a representative of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I thank you for your consideration in supporting research on curricular choices made by

grade six students entering grade seven.

Sincerely,

Dianne Sjoberg

Superintendent's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

_____ Please forward a summary report of the research findings to me at

----- email address _____ or

_____ divisional courier , or

_____ home address

Apt. # Street # Street Postal Code

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding

Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix B: Informed Consent for Principals



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Title of Research Study: An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Student Researcher and Contact information: Dianne Sjoberg, 403 Southport Boulevard, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0A8, (204) 885-0700 (telephone); dsjoberg@mymts.net (email)

Research Supervision: Dr. Francine Morin, Room 230 Education, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2, (204) 474-9054 (telephone); fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca (email)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Focus and Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this qualitative research study is to determine reasons for certain curricular choices when subject options, particularly music education choices, are available to students in grade seven in a particular urban school division. The goals of the study are to determine the factors that encourage students to choose music as an option in grade seven and the factors that discourage students from choosing music as an option in grade seven. The study will attempt to answer the questions:

- i. why do some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why do some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?

Research Procedures: Six participants who are enrolled in a music programme in grade seven, and six participants who are not enrolled in a music education programme in grade seven will spend one hour each with the researcher in conversation regarding their school

music experience, their extracurricular music experience and their family's involvement in music. They will be asked what information they had in the spring of grade six regarding their optional courses for grade seven. They will also be asked how and why they made their decision regarding the option that they chose.

Students who are currently in grade seven in Pembina Trails School Division will be informed by one of the professional in their school building of the project in process. Students indicating an interest in giving an hour of their time to the project will be given a package of information addressed to their parents/guardians. This package will include:

- i. Participant information
- ii. Parent information
- iii. Parent consent and student assent form

These conversations will be held at the students' school, before or after school or at the noon hour by mutual agreement of the researcher and participant. The conversations may take place over the summer in which case the location and time will be mutually agreed upon by the student, the student's guardians, and the researcher.

These conversations will be recorded with a Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber, then transcribed and analyzed using qualitative techniques. The results of this analysis will be triangulated with the analyses of the focus group conversations to confirm the findings.

Elementary music educators from Pembina Trails School Division will be asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the elementary school educators' perceptions of the elementary school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum, methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this groups' knowledge of the music programme in the school that the music educators' students will enter in grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes.

Middle years music educators in Pembina Trails School Division will asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the middle years school educators' perceptions of the middle years' school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum, methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this group's knowledge of the music programme in the school or schools that the music educators' students come from before grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes, what information is disseminated to feeder schools regarding the options available in grade seven, whether recruitment is intentionally undertaken and if so, how.

The two focus groups will be recorded with both video (Sony Camcorder) and audio

(Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber) devices, then transcribed and analyzed. Video recording is important in this setting for transcription accuracy and to ensure data are not lost. Having participants identify themselves prior to each opportunity to speak interrupts the flow and authenticity of conversation, and that personal identification step is not fully guaranteed in the throes of a conversation, therefore audio recording alone cannot be guaranteed to approach accuracy as to attribution of comments. While video recording does not guarantee accuracy, the possibility is greater than with audio recording alone. The results of this analysis will be referenced with the analyses of the face-to-face interview to confirm the findings.

Permission has been granted by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba and by the Pembina Trails School Division to proceed with this research. Your signature on this letter of intent grants permission from you, to the researcher, to recruit participants from your school community, and to use a space in your school building in which to conduct conversations.

Deception, Risks and Benefits: There will be no deception used in this study. There are no risks to the student participants in the study. By virtue of the fact that the participants are interested enough to take part in such a study, the results of the study may become part of the student's conversations with parents and others. There are no risks to the adult participants in the study. Benefits may include a professional conversation with their colleagues, new knowledge of professional practices of their colleagues and a new awareness of issues surrounding the choosing of options by their students.

Pembina Trails School Division has, in place, well developed policies and procedures regarding the revelation of emotionally charged circumstances or child abuse to a division employee. The researcher, as an employee of Pembina Trails School Division would be guided by those policies and procedures should any abuse be revealed during any interview.

Benefits to both student and adult participants in the study may or may not include light refreshments, dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the scheduling of the interviews or the focus groups.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Pseudonyms will be assigned to the participants and will be used in any transcription, analysis and report. Should the name of the participants or the school, or school division be mentioned in the interview, they will not be used in the transcription. Any written transcriptions or notes will be stored on a password protected computer. All data, including hard copies of transcriptions and notes and interview tapes, will be kept in a locked, secure cabinet in my home. **No recording, audio or visual, in whole or in part, shall be used in any presentation of the thesis. If a direct quotation from a transcription is used in the writing of the thesis, sentence structure will be such that the quotation cannot be attributed to your child, or a pseudonym will be used. An example of the use of sentence structure that would protect the anonymity of the speaker might be, "One of the grade seven students said" or "An elementary music educator expressed this idea by saying".** Tapes, both

audio and video, will be destroyed upon completion of the project and my thesis defense. None of these taped recordings, neither audio, nor video, will be used in the presentation of the thesis, nor in any public forum of any kind. Should any direct quotes from the transcriptions of the recorded interviews or focus groups be used in the writing of the thesis, or presentation of the thesis in any forum, pseudonyms will be assigned to the quote. The interview data will be kept with the intent and consent forms. A copy of the summary of the study will be delivered to the participants through the school mail system, or via Canada Post.

Compensation: There is no compensation or remuneration for the interviews or focus groups. Circumstances of interview appointments and focus group settings may present the opportunity to offer light refreshments to the participants.

Feedback and Debriefing: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same.

How to Withdraw: Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, via phone call or email or letter to the researcher, or by indicating verbally during a conversation of their wish to withdraw. The participant may also choose at any time in a conversation to decline to answer a question, or comment on a topic at hand.

Dissemination of Results: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same. Copies of the thesis will be used by the faculty advisor and thesis committee for assessment of the work. The thesis will be used as the basis for an article for a professional music educators' journal. Because pseudonyms will be used throughout the process of and the writing of the thesis, the participants' right to confidentiality is intact.

Destruction of Data: Pursuant to completion of the project and the defense of the thesis, any hard copies of transcriptions or research notes will be shredded. Video and audio tapes will be destroyed. Electronic copies of the thesis will be held in a password protected computers

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to allow recruitment of participants for this research, and for conversations necessary to this research to occur in XXXXXXXXXX. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering questions they prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Participants' continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent, so they, and the school division, should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout participation in the study.

The University of Manitoba Ethics Board and a representative of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

Appendix C: Information for Middle Years Music Educators



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June, 2011

Ms/r. XXXXXX
XXXX School

Dear XXXXX,

I am studying in the faculty of education at the University of Manitoba, and I am interested in learning about how your students made the choice to take (place name of option here) this year, and if they got the information and support that they needed when they made that decision.

The purpose of the study, as outlined in detail in the enclosed consent form, is to find out the reasons that students have for choosing their options for grade seven. I want to find out factors that encourage students to take the options that they choose. I am doing the study to try to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?

In addition to your participation in a focus group, as outlined in the consent form, I am also asking for your cooperation in recruiting students from your (place name of option here, ie band, choral, general music) class. Because there can be no presence or appearance of coercion of any students to participate in this study, I am hoping that you will allow time during one of your grade seven music classes for one of your colleagues to speak to your students in your absence. This process is necessary to prevent any undue pressure on your students. If you do the recruiting for me, the students may feel some pressure to participate, perhaps thinking that their grade in your class, or their optional choices for next year might be affected by their participation, or their non-participation in the project. I will arrange for one of your colleagues to visit one of your classes as soon as I hear from you as to your wishes via our division email.

Thanks so much for your help with this project.

Sincerely,

Dianne Sjoberg

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding

Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix D: Information for Prospective Participants Currently in Music



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An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

If you have chosen to engage in music studies in the middle years, when other options have become available to you, I invite you to participate in a study I am conducting.

My name is Dianne Sjoberg, and I am an elementary music educator, who is currently conducting field-work in partial fulfillment of a Master of Education degree in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba. I am planning to explore how and why students entering grade seven make their course option decisions, specifically how and why they choose to take a grade seven music option, and how and why they do not choose to take a grade seven music option.

I am planning to interview interested participants about their musical experiences, at school, at home and outside of home and school. I am also planning to ask them to tell me how they think their peers and their parents view music education.

The interview will be conducted when it is convenient for you and me to get together. This could be before or after school or at the lunch hour if we can arrange to meet before the end of June. If the interview takes place over the summer months, we will consult with your parents about a good place for the interview. The interview will take no more than an hour.

The interview will be audio-taped by me, and later I, will listen to the tapes and write down what both you and I have said. I will also take written notes during our conversation. I will make sure that what you tell me stays private. I won't use your own name in my notes, and if I do need to use a name in my notes or in my final paper, I will make up a name for you. That is called "using a pseudonym". I won't say anything about you in my notes or in my final paper that might let people know what you have said during our conversation. If a direct quotation from the transcription is used in my paper, I will write it so that no one will know that you said it, or I will use your pseudonym. This is called protecting your confidentiality.

You are allowed to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you, and you can ask me to stop the interview any time you like. After we have had our interview, you can still ask me to take your interviews out of my study if you wish. I would appreciate it if you call me in the next two weeks after your interview, if you decide that you do not want your interview to be used as part of my study

Your participation in this study would be much appreciated but I want you to know that your participation in this study is optional and voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not, there will be no affect on your grades in any of your courses this year. Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your optional courses for next year, either.

If you do choose to participate, you will receive a draft of the final report of the study. It will be delivered to you at your home address as soon as it is completed.

The interviews are planned for June and July of 2011.

Please indicate your interest in participating in this by working with your parents to complete the enclosed forms and returning them in the enclosed stamped envelope.

Should you have questions, please feel free to contact me at the address below or at dsjoberg@mts.net. Questions may also be directed to my research supervisor, Dr. Francine Morin at fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca or at 204-474-9054.

Thank you for considering offering your time to this study.

Sincerely,

Dianne Sjoberg

Dianne Sjoberg

403 Southport Boulevard ■ Winnipeg, Manitoba ■ R3P 0A8 ■ Phone: 885-0700

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix E: Information for Participants' Parents or Guardians



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Fax (204) 474-7550

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

If your child is in grade seven and has chosen optional subjects for their grade seven year, I would invite him or her participate in a study I am conducting.

My name is Dianne Sjoberg, and I am an elementary music educator, who is currently **conducting field-work in partial fulfillment of a Master of Education degree in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba. I am planning to explore how and why students entering grade seven make their course option decisions, specifically how and why they choose to take a grade seven music option, and how and why they do not choose to take a grade seven music option.**

The purpose of my study is to find out the reasons students have for choosing options when they enter grade seven. I want to find out what factors encouraged you to take the options that you chose. I am trying to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?**
- ii. why some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?**
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?**

I am planning to interview interested students about their musical experiences, at school, at home and outside of home and school. I will also ask them to tell me how they think their peers and their parents view music education. Another topic of conversation will be how and why they chose the optional subjects that they chose for grade seven

The interview will be conducted at a mutually convenient time within the next two months, and will take no more than an hour. It will be conducted at your child's school before or after school or over the lunch hour. If the interview must take place over the summer months, a mutually agreeable and convenient location will be determined with your help.

The interview will be audio-taped by me, and will later be transcribed by me. I will also

take written notes. The confidentiality of your child will be maintained by use of a pseudonym and omission of personal information or names of persons or places in the transcriptions. **If a direct quotation from the transcription is used in the writing of the thesis, sentence structure will be such that the quotation cannot be attributed to your child, or a pseudonym will be used.** Your child may refuse to answer any question, or terminate the interview at any time, or withdraw from the study at any time **up to two weeks after the interview.**

I will deliver a copy of the conclusions of the study to your child at his or her school. To maintain confidentiality, it will be delivered through the school mail system.

The interviews are tentatively planned for late June and early July of 2011.

I hope that you would offer your consent to your child's participation in this study. If so, please complete the enclosed forms and return them in the enclosed stamped envelope.

Should you have questions, please feel free to contact me at the address or phone number below or at dsjoberg@mts.net. Questions may also be directed to my research supervisor, Dr. Francine Morin at fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca or at 204-474-9054.

Thank you for consenting to your child's participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Dianne Sjoberg

Dianne Sjoberg

403 Southport Boulevard ■ Winnipeg, Manitoba ■ R3P 0A8 ■ Phone: 885-0700

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix F: Informed Participant and Parental Assent/Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Participant Assent/Parent Consent Form

Title of Research Study: An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Student Researcher and Contact Information: Dianne Sjoberg, 403 Southport Boulevard, Winnipeg Manitoba, R3P 0A8, (204) 885-0700 (telephone); dsjoberg@mymts.net (email). Dianne Sjoberg is currently conducting field work in partial fulfillment of a Master of Education degree in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba.

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about, and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Your child is being asked to participate in this research study. Please take your time to review this consent form and discuss it with your child.

If you or your child would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask Mrs. Sjoberg, or Dr. Francine Morin, her thesis advisor. You may also feel free to discuss the contents of this consent form with other family and friends.

1. Purpose of Research Project This research study is being undertaken find out why students choose the music option upon entering grade seven, and why students do not choose a music option, as they enter grade seven and how these students make their decision.

2. Research Procedure The participants in this study will have a face to face interview with the researcher. Each one time interview is expected to take less than one hour,

before or after school or at the noon hour, or over the course of the summer at a mutually acceptable location. The interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed.

Participants will be asked what their previous musical experience is, how they think their families view music education and how their peers view music education. They will also be asked how they made their decision, and why they made their decision.

3. Risk There are no undue risks for participants in this study. It is anticipated that participants will value and appreciate the opportunity to discuss their perceptions of choice of options at the middle years/junior high level of school

4. Confidentiality Every attempt will be made to keep your child's contribution confidential. In the report based on your child's interview, your child will be given a pseudonym. If your family's name or a friend's name or the name of the school or neighbourhood is mentioned in the interview, those names will be changed or blanked out in the notes, transcriptions and reports on the interview. **If a direct quotation from the transcription is used in the writing of the thesis, sentence structure will be such that the quotation cannot be attributed to your child, or a pseudonym will be used.** All transcriptions and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet, along with any video and audio tapes **No recording, or portion thereof, will be used in any way in the thesis, or in any other public or semi-public forum.**

All electronic notes will be filed in a password protected computer. All hard copies of transcriptions and notes will be shredded after the thesis defense. All tapes will be destroyed after the thesis defense.

5. Feedback A copy of the conclusions of the thesis will be provided to your child through the school's mail system, or through Canada Post.

6. Participation and Compensation Each person's participation is voluntary, and each person is free to withdraw from the study at any time, and for any reason with no repercussions. There is no compensation or remuneration for the interviews. Circumstances may present the opportunity to offer light refreshments to the subjects.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding your child's participation in the research project and agree to give consent to his/her participation. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher from her legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to ask that your child withdraw from the study at any time, and to counsel him or her that he/she may refrain from answering any questions. Your child's continued participation should be as informed as at your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your child's participation.

The University of Manitoba Ethics Board and a representative of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the ENREB (Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122 or Dr. Francine Morin at fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca or at 204-474-9054. A copy of this intent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

+++++

Statement of Assent For Participant Under the Age of Fourteen

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with my parent. I have had my questions answered by her. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw at any time. I freely agree to participate in this research study. I understand that information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential, but that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. By signing this consent form, I have not waived any of the legal rights that I have as a participant in a research study.

Participant Signature

Date

Participant Printed Name

+++++

Statement of Consent Form: Parent or Legal guardian

I _____ do give consent for my child _____
 (please print full name) (please print full name)

to participate in this study.

_____ **Parent/Legal Guardian Signature**

_____ **Date**

_____ **Researcher's Signature** _____ **Date** _____

Please send the summary of the study to our child via

_____ Pembina Trails division courier _____
School

_____ Canada Post _____
Apt. # Street # Street Postal Code

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

Appendix G: Sample Scheduling Information for Participants



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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

_____ will participate in the study.

My parents and I prefer our interview to occur at:

Location

on

_____ Tuesday, July 19, 2011 _____ AM _____ PM _____ Eve

_____ Wednesday July 20, 2011 _____ AM _____ PM _____ Eve

_____ Thursday July 21, 2011 _____ AM _____ PM _____ Eve

_____ Any of the above

Contact me and my parents regarding firm date at:

Phone: _____

Summer email: _____

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix H: Script for Middle Years Educators **Participant Recruiting**

Teachers always want do their best to understand their students and to help their students get what they need from the school system. **One of my colleagues, who is studying in the faculty of education at the University of Manitoba, is interested in learning about how you made the choice to take (place name of option here) this year, and if you got the information and support that you needed when you made that decision.**

The purpose of the study is to find out the reasons that you had for choosing your options last year. The researcher wants to find out factors that encouraged you to take the options that you chose. She is doing the study to try to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?**
- ii. why some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?**
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?**

She wants to have a conversation with at least six students who are in grade seven and who are in a music programme, and at least six students who are not in a music programme.

She wants you to know that the conversation would take about an hour, and she would come to the school to meet with you. We can arrange for a place for you to talk to her. She also wants you to know that everything you say would be strictly confidential.

She would audio record your conversation with a tape recorder. After she has talked with you, she will type out your whole conversation, and then she will review what you say, along with what other grade seven students have said.

She has given some packages of information to me that include letters for you and letters for your parents. Your parents have to give you permission to be part of the study, then, you need to agree in writing to participate in the study. The researcher's contact information is in the package so that you can contact her to arrange a time for your interview. She will come to the school before school, over the lunch hour or right after school so your school day is not interrupted. If these times do not work, other options will be explored with you.

Any time we listen to our students, we have the opportunity to be better teachers! If you would like a package to take home to talk with your parents about, just see me or pick one up from (your choice of location, so the students may pick one up without your being privy to that knowledge).

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

**Appendix I: Informed Consent Middle Years Educators to
Allow Student Participant Recruiting from their Classes and/or to
Participate in a Focus Group**



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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Title of Research Study: An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Student Researcher and Contact information: Dianne Sjoberg, 403 Southport Boulevard, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0A8, (204) 885-0700 (telephone); dsjoberg@mymts.net (email)

Research Supervision: Dr. Francine Morin, Room 230 Education, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2, (204) 474-9054 (telephone); fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca (email)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Focus and Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this qualitative research study is to determine reasons for certain curricular choices when subject options, particularly music education choices, are available to students in grade seven in a particular urban school division. The goals of the study are to determine the factors that encourage students to choose music as an option in grade seven and the factors that discourage students from choosing music as an option in grade seven. The study will attempt to answer the questions:

- i. why do some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why do some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?

Research Procedures: Six participants who are enrolled in a music programme in grade seven, and six participants who are not enrolled in a music education programme in grade

seven will spend one hour each with the researcher in conversation regarding their school music experience, their extracurricular music experience and their family's involvement in music. They will be asked what information they had in the spring of grade six regarding their optional courses for grade seven. They will also be asked how and why they made their decision regarding the option that they chose.

Students who are currently in grade seven in Pembina Trails School Division will be informed by professional staff in their school building of the project in process. Students indicating an interest in giving an hour of their time to the project will be given a package of information addressed to their parents/guardians. This package will include:

- i. Participant information
- ii. Parent information
- iii. Parent consent and student assent form

These conversations will be held at the students' school, before or after school or at the noon hour by mutual agreement of the researcher and participant. The conversations may take place over the summer in which case the location and time will be mutually agreed upon by the student, the student's guardians, and the researcher.

These conversations will be recorded with a Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber, then transcribed and analyzed using qualitative techniques. The results of this analysis will be triangulated with the analyses of the focus group conversations to confirm the findings.

Elementary music educators from Pembina Trails School Division will be asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the elementary school educators' perceptions of the elementary school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum, methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this groups' knowledge of the music programme in the school that the music educators' students will enter in grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes.

Middle years music educators in Pembina Trails School Division will be asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the middle years school educators' perceptions of the middle years' school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum, methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this group's knowledge of the music programme in the school or schools that the music educators' students come from before grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes, what information is disseminated to feeder schools regarding the options available in grade seven, whether recruitment is intentionally undertaken and if so, how.

The two focus groups will be recorded with both video (Sony Camcorder) and audio (Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber) devices, then transcribed and analyzed. Video recording is important in this setting for transcription accuracy and to ensure data are not lost. Having participants identify themselves prior to each opportunity to speak interrupts the flow and authenticity of conversation, and that personal identification step is not fully guaranteed in the throes of a conversation, therefore audio recording alone cannot be guaranteed to approach accuracy as to attribution of comments. While video recording does not guarantee accuracy, the possibility is greater than with audio recording alone. The results of this analysis will be referenced with the analyses of the face-to-face interview to confirm the findings.

Permission has been granted by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba and by the Pembina Trails School Division to proceed with this research. Your signature on this letter of intent signifies your intent to assist in the research process by recruiting grade seven participants and/or to participate in a focus group of middle years elementary music educators, the date, time and location of which will be mutually agreed upon by the participants and the researcher.

Deception, Risks and Benefits: There will be no deception used in this study. There are no risks to the student participants in the study. By virtue of the fact that the participants are interested enough to take part in such a study, the results of the study may become part of the student's conversations with parents and others. There are no risks to the adult participants in the study. Benefits may include a professional conversation with their colleagues, new knowledge of professional practices of their colleagues and a new awareness of issues surrounding the choosing of options by their students.

Pembina Trails School Division has, in place, well developed policies and procedures regarding the revelation of emotionally charged circumstances or child abuse to a division employee. The researcher, as an employee of Pembina rails School Division would be guided by those policies and procedures should any abuse be revealed during any interview.

Benefits to both student and adult participants in the study may or may not include light refreshments, dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the scheduling of the interviews or the focus groups.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Pseudonyms will be assigned to the participants and will be used in any transcription, analysis and report. Should the name of the participants or the school, or school division be mentioned in the interview, they will not be used in the transcription. **No recording, audio or visual, in whole or in part, shall be used in any presentation of the thesis. If a direct quotation from a transcription is used in the writing of the thesis, sentence structure will be such that the quotation cannot be attributed to the speaker, or a pseudonym will be used. An example of the use of sentence structure that would protect the anonymity of the speaker might be, "One of the grade seven students said" or "An elementary music educator expressed this**

idea by saying,” followed by the quote. Any written transcriptions or notes will be stored on a password protected computer. All data, including hard copies of transcriptions and notes and interview tapes, will be kept in a locked, secure cabinet in my home. Tapes, both audio and video, will be destroyed upon completion of the project and my thesis defense. No recording, or portion thereof, will be used in any way in the thesis, or in any other public or semi-public forum. The interview data will be kept with the intent and consent forms. A copy of the summary of the study will be delivered to the participants through the school mail system, or via Canada Post.

Compensation: There is no compensation or remuneration for the interviews or focus groups. Circumstances of interview appointments and focus group settings may present the opportunity to offer light refreshments to the participants.

Feedback and Debriefing: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same.

How to Withdraw: Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, via phone call or email or letter to the researcher, or by indicating verbally during a conversation of their wish to withdraw. The participant may also choose at any time in a conversation to decline to answer a question, or comment on a topic at hand.

Dissemination of Results: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same. Copies of the thesis will be used by the faculty advisor and thesis committee for assessment of the work. The thesis will be used as the basis for an article for a professional music educators’ journal. Because pseudonyms will be used throughout the process of and the writing of the thesis, the participants’ right to confidentiality is intact.

Destruction of Data: Pursuant to completion of the project and the defense of the thesis, any hard copies of transcriptions or research notes will be shredded. Video and audio tapes will be destroyed. Electronic copies of the thesis will be held in a password protected computers

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to allow recruitment of participants for this research, and for conversations necessary to this research to occur in XXXXXXXXXX. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering questions they prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Participants’ continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent, so they, and the school division, should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout participation in the study.

The University of Manitoba Ethics Board and a representative of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access

to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I thank you for your consideration in supporting research on curricular choices made by grade six students entering grade seven.

Sincerely,

Dianne Sjoberg

I agree to assist in recruiting grade seven participants for “An exploration of student choice making regarding music as an option in grade seven”

Middle Years Educator’s Signature

Date

Middle years Educator Name, Block Printing

School

I agree to assist in the study “ An exploration of student choice making regarding music as an option in grade seven” by participating in a focus group of middle years music educators, the date, time and location of which is to be mutually agreed upon by other participants and the researcher.

Middle Years Music Educator’s Signature

Date

Middle years Music Educator’s Name, Block Printing

School

Researcher’s Signature

Date

_____ Please forward a summary report of the research findings to me at

----- email address _____ or

_____ divisional courier , or

_____ home address

Apt. #

Street #

Street

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

Appendix J: Scheduling Information for Focus Groups



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

I _____ will participate in the study.

I prefer focus group meeting and lunch at 11:00 at 403 Southport Boulevard (south off Corydon) on

_____ Tuesday, July 19, 2011

_____ Wednesday July 20. 2011

_____ Thursday July 21, 2011

_____ Any of the above

I am allergic to _____

Contact me regarding firm date at:

Phone: _____

Summer email: _____

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

Appendix K: Middle Years “Other” Teacher Letter
Request to Recruit Non Music Participants



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Education

Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

June , 2011

Ms/r. XXXXXX
XXXX School

Dear XXXXX,

I am currently conducting field-work for my thesis project in partial fulfillment of a Master of Education degree in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba.

I am studying the decisions that students make regarding their options for junior high, specifically how and why they make the choices that they do make. More specifically, I want to understand why some students choose music as an option, and why some students do not.

To have a full and clear picture, I need to speak directly to the people who make those choices, your students. As one facet of this study, I intend to interview, in on-on-one situations, at least six students who have chosen not to be involved in a grade seven music programme.

Having received permission from XXXXX of XXXXX School Division to recruit informants from XXXXX School Division and to conduct some facts of the study on school division property, and having received permission from you principal, XXXX to contact you, I am respectfully requesting your help in recruiting students to act as participants in the study. I am hoping that you will take the time to read the enclosed script to students in your care who are NOT currently enrolled in any part of the music programme in your school. Because there can be no presence or appearance of coercion of any students to participate in this study, I am hoping that you will set aside the student packages in a place where interested students can access them without your knowledge.

Thanks so much for your help with this project.

Sincerely,
Dianne Sjoberg

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix L: Information for Prospective Participants Not Currently in Music



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

You are in grade seven and have chosen some of your own course options for your grade seven year. I invite you to participate in a study I am conducting.

My name is Dianne Sjoberg, and I am an elementary music educator, who is currently **conducting field-work in partial fulfillment of a Master of Education degree in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba. I am planning to explore how and why students entering grade seven make their course option decisions, specifically how and why they choose to take a grade seven music option, and how and why they do not choose to take a grade seven music option.**

The purpose of my study is to find out the reasons students have for choosing options when they enter grade seven. I want to find out what factors encouraged you to take the options that you chose. I am trying to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?**
- ii. why some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?**
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?**

I am planning to interview interested participants about their musical experiences, at school, at home and outside of home and school. I am also planning to ask them to tell me how they think their peers and their parents view music education.

The interview will be conducted when it is convenient time for you and I to get together, before or after school or at the lunch hour within the next two months. If the interview takes place over the summer months, we will consult with your parents about an appropriate place for the interview. The interview will take no more than an hour.

The interview will be audio-taped by me, and later I will listen to the tapes and write down what we have said. I will also take written notes during our conversation. I will make sure that what you tell me stays private. I won't use your own name in my notes, and if I do need to use a name in my notes or in my final paper, I will make up a name for

you. That is called using a pseudonym. I won't say anything about you in my notes or in my final paper that might let people know what you said. **If a direct quotation from the transcription is used in my paper, I will write it so no one will know that you said it, or I will use your pseudonym.** This is called protecting your confidentiality. You are permitted to refuse to answer any question that I might ask you, and you can ask me to stop the interview any time you like. After we have had our interview, you will have two weeks to call me and ask me to take your interviews out of my study if you wish.

Your participation in this study would be much appreciated but I want you to understand that your participation in the study also voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not, there will be no affect on your grades this or your optional courses for next year.

You will receive copy of the conclusions of the study. It will be delivered to you by Canada Post as soon as it is completed.

The interviews are planned for June and July of 2011.

Please indicate your interest in participating in this by working with your parents to complete the enclosed forms and returning them in the enclosed stamped envelope.

Should you have questions, please feel free to contact me at the address or phone number below or at dsjoberg@mts.net. Questions may also be directed to my research supervisor, Dr. Francine Morin at fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca or at 204-474-9054.

Thank you for considering offering your time to this study.

Sincerely,

Dianne Sjoberg

Dianne Sjoberg

403 Southport Boulevard ■ Winnipeg, Manitoba ■ R3P 0A8 ■ Phone: 885-0700

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

Appendix M: Information for Elementary Music Educators



UNIVERSITY
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230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

June, 2011

Ms. XXXXXX
XXXX School

Dear XXXXX,

I am currently conducting field-work for my thesis project in partial fulfillment of a Master of Education degree in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Manitoba. I am studying the decisions students make regarding their options for junior high, specifically how and why they make the choices that they make during the spring and summer of their grade six year. More specifically, I want to understand why some students choose music as an option, and why some students do not and how they make that choice. To have a full and clear picture, I need input from the adults in the children's lives.

Having received permission from Lawrence Lussier of Pembina Trails School Division School division to recruit participants from Pembina Trails School Division School Division and to conduct some facets of the study on school division property, and having received permission from your principal to contact you, I am respectfully requesting your participation in a focus group conversation. Both elementary and middle years music specialists in Pembina Trails School Division are being asked to participate in separate focus groups, one for elementary music educators and one for middle years music educators.

I am hoping that you will take the time to sit as a member of a focus group of the elementary music educators in Pembina Trails. The information that you supply as part of that group will help me to fill out and clarify the information that I glean from the students themselves.

The focus group meeting will be held at 403 Southport Boulevard during the third week of July. The conversation will be led by myself, and will be both video and audio recorded. After transcription and analysis, these tapes will be destroyed. After completion of the research project, the notes from the conversation will be shredded. If, for purposes of clarity in writing, names are necessary, pseudonyms will be used. Your confidentiality in the publication of the thesis, or any documents arising from same, is

secure.

Consent forms are enclosed and may be returned to me in the enclosed, self-addressed envelope.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration for this endeavour.
Sincerely,

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

Appendix N: Informed Consent for Elementary Music Educators



UNIVERSITY
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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

230 Education Building
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2
Telephone (204) 474-9014
Fax (204) 474-7550

Title of Research Study: An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Student Researcher and Contact information: Dianne Sjoberg, 403 Southport Boulevard, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0A8, (204) 885-0700 (telephone); dsjoberg@mymts.net (email)

Research Supervision: Dr. Francine Morin, Room 230 Education, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2, (204) 474-9054 (telephone); fmorin@cc.umanitoba.ca (email)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Focus and Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this qualitative research study is to determine reasons for certain curricular choices when subject options, particularly music education choices, are available to students in grade seven in a particular urban school division. The goals of the study are to determine the factors that encourage students to choose music as an option in grade seven and the factors that discourage students from choosing music as an option in grade seven. The study will attempt to answer the questions:

- i. why do some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why do some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how do students choose amongst the optional courses available to them in grade seven?

Research Procedures: Six participants who are enrolled in a music programme in grade seven, and six participants who are not enrolled in a music education programme in grade seven will spend one hour each with the researcher in conversation regarding their school music experience, their extracurricular music experience and their family's involvement

in music. They will be asked what information they had in the spring of grade six regarding their optional courses for grade seven. They will also be asked how and why they made their decision regarding the option that they chose.

Students who are currently in grade seven in Pembina Trails School Division will be informed by their music educator, or another professional in their school building of the project in process. Students indicating an interest in giving an hour of their time to the project will be given a package of information addressed to their parents/guardians. This package will include:

- i. Participant information
- ii. Parent information
- iii. Parent consent and student assent form

These conversations will be held at the students' school, before or after school or at the noon hour by mutual agreement of the researcher and participant. The conversations may take place over the summer in which case the location and time will be mutually agreed upon by the student, the student's guardians, and the researcher.

These conversations will be recorded with a Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber, then transcribed and analyzed using qualitative techniques. The results of this analysis will be triangulated with the analyses of the focus group conversations to confirm the findings.

Elementary music educators from Pembina Trails School Division will be asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the elementary school educators' perceptions of the elementary school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum, methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this groups' knowledge of the music programme in the school that the music educators' students will enter in grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes.

Middle years music educators in Pembina Trails School Division will be asked to participate in a focus group. These people will be recruited by letter through the Pembina Trails divisional mail service. This focus group conversation will be conducted to reveal the middle years school educators' perceptions of the middle years' school music experience that is offered to the students of the school division, including curriculum, methodological approach or approaches used, assessment and extra-curricular opportunities. The conversation will also be used to uncover this group's knowledge of the music programme in the school or schools that the music educators' students come from before grade seven. The conversation will include details of the educators' attitudes and actions regarding their students' entry into grade seven music education programmes, what information is disseminated to feeder schools regarding the options available in grade seven, whether recruitment is intentionally undertaken and if so, how.

The two focus groups will be recorded with both video (Sony Camcorder) and audio (Panasonic Microcassette Transcriber) devices, then transcribed and analyzed. Video recording is important in this setting for transcription accuracy and to ensure data are not lost. Having participants identify themselves prior to each opportunity to speak interrupts the flow and authenticity of conversation, and that personal identification step is not fully guaranteed in the throes of a conversation, therefore audio recording alone cannot be guaranteed to approach accuracy as to attribution of comments. While video recording does not guarantee accuracy, the possibility is greater than with audio recording alone. The results of this analysis will be referenced with the analyses of the face-to-face interview to confirm the findings.

Permission has been granted by the Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba and by the Pembina Trails School Division to proceed with this research. Your signature on this letter of intent signifies your intent to participate in a focus group of elementary music educators, the date, time and location of which will be mutually agreed upon by the participants and the researcher.

Deception, Risks and Benefits: There will be no deception used in this study. There are no risks to the student participants in the study. By virtue of the fact that the participants are interested enough to take part in such a study, the results of the study may become part of the student's conversations with parents and others. There are no risks to the adult participants in the study. Benefits may include a professional conversation with their colleagues, new knowledge of professional practices of their colleagues and a new awareness of issues surrounding the choosing of options by their students.

Benefits to both student and adult participants in the study may or may not include light refreshments, dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the scheduling of the interviews or the focus groups.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Pseudonyms will be assigned to the participants and will be used in any transcription, analysis and report. Should the name of the participants or the school, or school division be mentioned in the interview, they will not be used in the transcription. Any written transcriptions or notes will be stored on a password protected computer. All data, including hard copies of transcriptions and notes and interview tapes, will be kept in a locked, secure cabinet in my home. **No recording, audio or visual, in whole or in part, shall be used in any presentation of the thesis. If a direct quotation from a transcription is used in the writing of the thesis, sentence structure will be such that the quotation cannot be attributed to the speaker, or a pseudonym will be used. An example of the use of sentence structure that would protect the anonymity of the speaker might be, "One of the grade seven students said" or "An elementary music educator expressed this idea by saying".** Tapes, both audio and video, will be destroyed upon completion of the project and my thesis defense. The interview data will be kept with the intent and consent forms. A copy of the summary of the study will be delivered to the participants through the school mail system, or via Canada Post.

Compensation: There is no compensation or remuneration for the interviews or focus groups. Circumstances of interview appointments and focus group settings may present the opportunity to offer light refreshments to the participants.

Feedback and Debriefing: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same.

How to Withdraw: Participants may withdraw from the study at any time, via phone call or email or letter to the researcher, or by indicating verbally during a conversation of their wish to withdraw. The participant may also choose at any time in a conversation to decline to answer a question, or comment on a topic at hand.

Dissemination of Results: Copies of a summary of the study will be delivered to those study participants requesting same. Copies of the thesis will be used by the faculty advisor and thesis committee for assessment of the work. The thesis will be used as the basis for an article for a professional music educators' journal. Because pseudonyms will be used throughout the process of and the writing of the thesis, the participants' right to confidentiality is intact.

Destruction of Data: Pursuant to completion of the project and the defense of the thesis, any hard copies of transcriptions or research notes will be shredded. Video and audio tapes will be destroyed. Electronic copies of the thesis will be held in a password protected computers

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to allow recruitment of participants for this research, and for conversations necessary to this research to occur in XXXXXXXXX. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or refrain from answering questions they prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Participants' continued participation should be as informed as their initial consent, so they, and the school division, should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout participation in the study.

The University of Manitoba Ethics Board and a representative of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I thank you for your consideration in supporting research on curricular choices made by

grade six students entering grade seven.

Sincerely,

Dianne Sjoberg

Elementary Music Educator's Signature

Date

Elementary Music Educator's Name, Block Printing

Researcher's Signature

Date

_____ Please forward a summary report of the research findings to me at

----- email address _____ or

_____ divisional courier , or

_____ home address

Apt. #

Street #

Street

Postal Code

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix O: Interview Protocol: Six Students Currently in Music

Opening Comments:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on the topic of participation in optional music education classes. Teachers always want to do their best to understand their students and to help their students get what they need from the school system. I am studying in the faculty of education at the University of Manitoba, and I am interested in learning about how you made the choice to take (place name of option here, ie, band, choral, general music) this year, and if you got the information and support that you needed when you made that decision.

The purpose of my study is to find out the reasons students have for choosing options when they enter grade seven. I want to find out what factors encouraged you to take the options that you chose. I am trying to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. what do students think about the optional courses available to them in grade seven and having to choose?

In our time together, I would like to find what your experience in music education has been, both inside school and outside school, how you feel about music education, your current participation in music activities and your thought processes in determining your current participation.

Opening Questions:

Let's begin by talking about you.

Tell me about your experience in grade seven at school this year.

What are your school days like?

Tell me about your favourite times of the day, or your favourite activities, or subjects.

Tell me about the least favourite part of your school day.

What are some of the activities you are involved in outside of school? What are your recreational interests?

Tell me about your time in elementary school.

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?

Tell me about elementary school art..

What do you remember spending the most time doing?

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?
Tell me about what you remember about how you were graded or assessed in your elementary art classes (if there were any)

Tell me about elementary school drama.

What do you remember spending the most time doing?

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?

Tell me about what you remember about how you were graded or assessed in your elementary drama classes (if there were any)

Tell me about elementary school music.

What do you remember spending the most time doing?

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?

Tell me about what you remember about how you were graded or assessed in your elementary music classes.

ONLY if this has not been divulged:

What music education activities have you been involved in outside of school?

What music education have your siblings been involved in?

What kinds of music activities does your family participate in?

Transition Questions:

I am interested in how you made your decision about your course options for this year?

What option did you choose?

How did you make your decision?

Prompts:

What did you think about when you were selecting your options for your first year in junior high school?

How was information provided to you about your course options in grade seven?

What were your other options?

What discussions did you have with other people about your options?

Did your classroom teacher have information for you?

Did any other adult in your elementary school give you information about the

options that you would have in this school?
 Did anyone from the junior high school visit your classroom?
 Did you discuss your options with your parents?
 Did you discuss the options with your friends?
 Did you discuss your options with any of your other elementary school teachers?

What music programme are you involved in now? (Clarify courses for credit and extra-curricular activities, activities in the community, private lessons, etc.)

Key Questions:

Why did you choose to take music for your grade seven year?
 (The answer may lead to more conversation)

What do you think are the benefits of studying music?

Please tell me how your experience has been in the music programme that you are in now.

How is music assessed in your grade seven year? What do think about that?

Knowing what you know now, would you have made the same decision?

Do you think that you had all the information that you needed to make your decision?

If not, what could the adults have done for you. If not, how could you have obtained more information?

Can you tell me why other students might not choose music as their option?

How important do you think it is that student have a choice of options for grade seven?

Why or why is it not important?

Do you think that students should have to choose between (amongst) options?

Ending Question:

Is there anything else you would like to add to the information that you have shared?

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me. The information you have given me will help me with my research project. If you would like, I can send you a copy of my findings when they are complete.

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix P: Interview Protocol: Six Students Not Currently in Music

Record: Pseudonym, Date, Start Time, End Time

Opening Comments:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on the topic of participation in optional music education classes. Teachers always want do their best to understand their students and to help their students get what they need from the school system. I am studying in the faculty of education at the University of Manitoba, and I am very interested in learning about how you made the choice to take (place name of option here) this year, and if you got the information and support that you needed when you made that decision.

The purpose of this study is to find out the reasons that students have for choosing their options for grade seven. I want to find out what factors encouraged you to take the options that you chose. I am doing the study to try to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how do students feel about the optional courses available to them in grade seven and having to choose?

In our time together, I would like to find what your experience in music education has been, both inside school and outside school, how you feel about music education, your current participation in music activities and your thought processes in determining your current course option choices.

Opening Questions:

Let's begin by talking about you.

Tell me about your experience in grade seven at school this year.

What is your school day like?

What is the rest of your day like?

What is the rest of your week like?

Tell me about your favourite times of the day, or your favourite activities, or subjects.

Tell me about the least favourite times of your school day.

What are some of the activities that you are involved in outside of school? What are your recreational interests?

Tell me about your time in elementary school.

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?

Tell me about elementary school art.

What do you remember spending the most time doing?

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?

Tell me about what you remember about how you were graded or assessed in your elementary art classes (if there were any)

Tell me about elementary school drama.

What do you remember spending the most time doing?

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?

Tell me about what you remember about how you were graded or assessed in your elementary drama classes (if there were any)

Tell me about elementary school music.

What do you remember spending the most time doing?

What do you remember enjoying the most?

What do you remember enjoying the least?

Tell me about what you remember about how you were graded or assessed in your elementary music classes.

ONLY if this has not been divulged:

What music education activities have you been involved in outside of school?

What music education have your siblings been involved in?

What kinds of music activities does your family participate in?

Transition Questions:

I am interested in how you made your decision about your course options for this year

How did you make your decision?

Prompts:

What did you think about when you were selecting your options for your first year in junior high school?

How was information provided to you about your course options in grade seven?

What were your other options?

What discussions did you have with other people about your options?

Did your grade six classroom teacher have information for you?

Did any other adult in your elementary school give you information about the options that you would have in this school?

Did anyone from the junior high school visit your classroom?

Did you discuss your options with your parents?

Did you discuss the options with your friends?

Did you discuss your options with any of your other elementary school teachers?

What optional subjects do you have to choose from at this school?

What option did you choose?

Key Questions: (Not necessarily in this order)

Can you tell me why you chose to take this option?

How, besides your discussions with your family and friends, did you make this decision?

Please tell me how your experience has been in this programme?

Tell me why you chose.....instead of music/band (or other options)?

Tell me what you think are the benefits of studying (current option)?

Tell me what you think are might be the benefits of studying music?

Remind me how music was assessed in your grade five and six classes? What do you think of that approach? How might assessment have affected your decision to opt out of music?

Do you remember having percentage marks in grades five and six for your music class?

What do you think about having percentages as a mark for music? How did you do in music class? Did that influence your decision about taking music this year?

How is your current option assessed in your grade seven year? Tell me what you think about that?

Please tell me how your experience has been in (course option).

Knowing what you know now, would you have made the same decision?

Do you think that you had all the information that you needed to make your decision.

If not, what else could the adults have done for you? If not, how could you have obtained more information?

Is there anything you can tell me about something that might have discouraged your choosing music as an option?

Is there anything that you can tell me about something that might have encouraged you to take music in junior high? Or anything that might have made you change your mind?

What does next year look like for you?

Do you intend to continue with your current option next year? Why or why not?

Do you intend to continue with this option in your high school career? Why or Why not?

What is your life like outside of school hours?

Do you participate in any lessons or clubs or teams outside of school? Is music one of them? If yes, pursue this conversation, ie..what kind of music activity? What type of music do you enjoy etc....If you were to make music, what could you see yourself doing?

How important do you think it is that students have a choice of options for grade seven?

Why or why is it not important?

Do you think that students should have to choose between (amongst) options?

Ending Question:

Is there anything else you would like to add to the information that you have given?

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me. The information you have given me will help me with my research project. If you would like, I can send you a copy of my findings when they are complete.

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix Q: Focus Group Protocol: Elementary Music Educators

Record: Pseudonym, Date, Start Time, End Time

Scripted prologue

Thank you so much for taking the time to come to this meeting and thanks also to XXXXX (the curriculum support person for the school division involved in helping to set up this meeting on my behalf)

As you know, I am a grad student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I have always been very interested in why students choose to enter music programmes in their grade seven school year, why some students do not choose music, and how the students make that decision.

The purpose of the study is to find out the reasons that our students have for choosing their options for grade seven. I want to find out factors that encouraged your students to take the options that they choose. I am doing the study to try to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why some students not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how students feel about the optional courses available to them in grade seven and how they feel about having to choose?

I am (will be) interviewing students in grade seven. Some of the students I am interviewing are in music programmes, some have not chosen music. I am asking them questions about their musical background, what information they had about junior high options, and who they talked to about making the choices regarding their options.

You are intimately involved in the music education of our elementary students, therefore I felt a conversation might be helpful in gaining more insight into this issue than would a questionnaire.

I am recording this focus group conversation. I am using both audio and video recording equipment to ensure the inclusion of all your comments. Our conversation will transcribe it later. I want you to know, that everything said in this conversation is confidential. Your identities will be protected in the reporting of the results.

For the purposes of this focus group conversation, I have scripted some comments and questions to guide our conversation, and will do my best to include all of your thoughts and comments in the conversation. To attempt to honour all of you, after each initial statement or question by me, we will go around the group to get your initial thoughts and reactions, and then additional comments can be expressed.

If we are all comfortable, I will turn on the tape recorder and the camera.

Tell me about the music programme in your school.

Tell me about your students.

Tell me what you know about the music programme in the junior high school in which most of your students would enroll?

Tell me what you know about the other options available to your students in their grade seven year.

Why is choice important for students in the middle years?

How does your school disseminate information to our graduating students regarding their options junior high? (Home room teacher? Principal? Counselor? Resource person?)

Do you know if your school hosts the music educator from the neighbourhood for an information session for your students? Who organizes this? Do you know that music educator personally? Do you do any school communication/projects together?

What type of advice about junior high do your students ask of you? How do you go about answering their queries?

Do you offer unsolicited advice about which options your students might choose? How do you go about that?

What benefits of music education do you discuss with your students?

What are your thoughts about students continuing to pursue music studies in the middle years?

How might you encourage or motivate them to do so?

Should elementary music educators encourage students to continue their music studies through grade seven?

What factors do you think affect students' choices to continue their musical studies in grade seven?

Why do you think students are attracted to other options in your local junior high?

Is there anything else that any of you would like to add to this discussion?

Thank you SO much for your time and contribution to my project!

If you would like to receive a copy of the conclusions of my work, please leave the email address that you would like it directed to on the sheet at the door.

Thank you, again!

An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding Music as an Option in Grade Seven

Appendix R: Focus Group Protocol: Middle Years Music Educators

Record: Participants, Pseudonyms, Date, Start Time, End Time

Scripted prologue

Thank you so much for taking the time to come to this meeting and thanks also to XXXXX (the curriculum support person for the school division involved in helping to set up this meeting on my behalf)

As you know, I am a grad student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I have always been very interested in why students choose to enter music programmes in their grade seven school year, and why some students do not choose music. I am very interested in how the students make that decision.

The purpose of the study is to find out the reasons that our students have for choosing their options for grade seven. I want to find out factors that encouraged your students to take the options that they chose. I am doing the study to try to find out:

- i. why some students choose music as an option in grade seven?
- ii. why some students do not choose music as an option in grade seven?
- iii. how students feel about the optional courses available to them and having to choose for grade seven?

I am (will be) interviewing students in grade seven. Some of the students I am interviewing are in music programmes, some have not chosen music. I am asking them questions about their musical background, what information they had about course options in grade seven, and who they talked to about making the choices regarding their options. I have also met with (will be meeting with) a focus group of middle years music educators to determine their thoughts on this subject.

You are intimately involved in the music education that our grade seven students sign up for, therefore I felt a conversation with you might be helpful in gaining more insight into this issue than would a questionnaire.

I am video recording this focus group conversation as well as audio-taping it as a back up. Our conversation will be transcribed it later. I want you to know that everything said in this conversation is confidential. Your identities will be protected in the reporting of the results.

For the purposes of this focus group conversation, I have scripted some comments and questions to guide our conversation, and will do my best to include all of your thoughts and comments in the conversation. To attempt to honour all of you, after each initial statement or question by me, we will go around the group to get your initial thoughts and

reactions, and then additional comments can be expressed.

If we are all comfortable, I will turn on the tape recorder and the camera.

Tell me about the music programme in your school.

Tell me about your students.

Tell me what you know about the music programmes in the elementary schools from which most of your students would come?

What are your thoughts about students continuing to pursue music studies in the middle years?

How do you encourage or motivate elementary students to continue in music in grade seven?

Does your school disseminate information to the grade six students in your feeder schools regarding their options junior high? (Home room teacher? Principal? Counselor? Resource person?)

Do any of you visit your neighbourhood schools to give an information session to prospective students? Who organizes this? Do you know the elementary music educators personally? Do you do any school communication/projects together?

What form of identification of recruits to your programme do you have?

What factors do you think affect students' choices to continue their musical studies in grade seven?

Tell me about what other options might be available to your students in your school?

Why is choice important for students in middle years?

Why are students attracted to other options in your school?

Is there anything else that any of you would like to add to this discussion?

Thank you SO much for your time and contribution to my project!

If you would like to receive a copy of the conclusions of my work, please leave the email address that you would like it directed to on the sheet at the door.

Thank you, again!

**An Exploration of Student Choice Making Regarding
Music as an Option in Grade Seven**

**Appendix S: Categories and Codes Developed through Analyses
and for Analyses of the Data**

School Experience in Grade 7: SE7

Expectation: SE7 EX

Reality: SE7 R

Home Room Teacher: SE7 T

Subject Specialist Teachers: SE7 S

Extracurricular Activities: SE7 EC

Knowledge of Extracurricular activities: SE7 EC K

Participation in SE7 EC P

SE 7 EC P IM = Intramurals

SE7 EC P S= Sports Teams

SE7 EC P M = Music

SE7 EC P O= other such as chess clubs etc...

Own Activities Outside of School SE7 OA

Sports SE7 OA S

Lessons Music SE7 OA ML

Dance SE7 OA DaL

Drama SE7 OA Dr L

Other SE7 OA O

Own Volition SE7 OA OV could be fishing, skateboarding etc....

Family SE7 OA F

Best Part of Grade Seven SE7 B

Least enjoyed part of grade seven SE7 W

School Experience K-6 SE K-6

Use of codes as above ie: SEK-6 P S is school experience from kindergarten through grade six participation in sports teams

Factors Affecting Choice of Option FAC

Friends: FAC Fr

Family: FAC Fa

Parents specifically: FAC Fa Par

Staff: (Teachers, Principals etc) FAC S

Passion: FAC Pas

Knowledge of Benefits: FAC KB

Factors Discouraging a Choice of Option: FDC

Perception of Personal Capability: FDC PC

Perceived Difficulty of option: FDC PDD

Assessment Issues: FDC