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**Scaffolding Music Literacy:  
Building Successful Compositions for All  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research study documents the observed and reported experiences within four third grade music classes, when musical composition encourages the growth of music literacy and knowledge for students with disabilities. All students within the study participated within a variety of activities, which deal with the learning, and applications of reading and writing music. The study examines and reports the processes of the students' achievement throughout these scaffolded activities and the connection music literacy has to other aspects of music such as achievement, growth through scaffolding, and the development of music as a language.

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## **RESEARCHERS STANCE**

### **Why Do You Like Music?**

Early in my career, one of my elementary school music students asked me quite innocently “Why do you like music so much?” This question coming from a second grader caught me by surprise. As a music teacher, I always assumed that people will understand my passion for the subject and why I want to teach it to others. After pondering this question, I realized that my love for music was created while I was this student’s age and even younger. Family, friends, and teachers all fostered my love for music and helped me to develop my passion for sharing my musical talents with others.

As a child some of my earliest memories are of music: singing with my mother as we drove in the car, listening to my father play Christmas carols on the piano, and sitting by the organ in amazement as I watched my aunt practice her prelude for church services each week. Because I was surrounded by music, it was not long until I asked to take piano lessons so that I could one day become an amazing musician too. At the age of five I was learning how to read music and play the piano. Making my way through elementary school, I always knew that these skills were ones that not all students possessed. When we were in music class, I often observed my friends and classmates having great difficulty attempting to read music, and it was often with frustration that I would watch many quit music as soon as it was no longer required because, they felt, reading music was just too hard.

Once I had gotten through high school and began college, I understood that many of these students had been learning music much too late in their lives. Music is its own language with its own grammatical rules and syntax. Often, students are only educated in

this complicated language if they are taking instrumental lessons. While many students at this age are able to develop the skills needed to read music, if it is not encouraged in their regular music classroom first, students may become frustrated more easily. Armed with this knowledge, I became an elementary school music teacher.

Now as a general music educator, I feel that it is extremely important that all students learn how to read and write music starting in kindergarten. Since students learn how to read at this level, why not teach the same students the beginning levels of music literacy? It is by learning how to read and write music from an early age that students are able to expand their musical skills far more rapidly than if music literacy skills had not been taught to them. Students, now in the upper grades of my school, have developed aural/ oral skills, which they may not have had without the opportunity to become musically literate in class. Abilities to identify timbre (the sound of an instrument) and musical forms seem to come much more easily to these students than those who had not been taught how to read and write music, but instead have learned to play instruments or have been taught only through aural/ oral means (learning by ear). While discussing genres of music, students are able to look at music of various time periods and identify dynamics, melodies, and tone color, which support a more in depth learning of the music.

With these newfound observations and a renewed understanding of my own passion for music, I asked the question, “What effect does musical composition have on the music literacy of an inclusive primary grade classroom?” It is my hope that through collecting data from quizzes, musical compositions, interviews, and journaling both on my experiences as well as the students’ behaviors that I will be able to come to some understanding as to how much of an impact music literacy has on all of my students.

With this understanding, I will then be able to further develop my own teaching to help my students become the strongest musicians they can be. In so doing, I hope to inspire future musicians to go on and perform, compose, and teach as the cycle of musical passion continues in the next generation.

### **Practical Knowledge**

Since the very beginning of my career as a music educator, I have heeded the words of my college professor Dr. Adam Brennan, who was always a strong believer in teaching students musical notation just as it is presented on the page. Starting in kindergarten, I introduce children to rhythmic notation. By the end of their first year in my classroom it is my goal that all students will be able to identify and name quarter notes, quarter rests, eighth notes, half notes, and several other rhythmic notes. Every year after much review and application, the students develop the ability to identify and perform more rhythmic notations. In so doing, I have set the stage for their ability to transfer their knowledge of reading music to writing music.

Through the scaffolding created from year to year for each grade level, I have discovered that students are able to sight-read most rhythmic notation placed in front of them. It is only once students have reached third grade that the benchmark is set for all students to begin learning musical notation on a staff. This task is often difficult at first, but is quickly developed into a fluent skill due to students' past knowledge of rhythmic notation. After beginning to demonstrate the ability to read music, third grade classes begin composing their own melodies. However, it has been my observation that many of my students with disabilities have difficulty transferring their skills of reading music to the skills of writing and performing it. Unsure as to what to do with these students in a

mainstreamed classroom, I would often hope that working with classmates would help them to understand and comprehend the skills being taught. However, these group activities would often discourage some of the students involved. I did not understand what approach would work to ensure their success. Frustrated with the prospect of disillusioned special needs students in the music classroom, I devised a solution. I would take action and develop a new approach to foster music literacy skills within my students. In so doing, I began to ponder the question, “What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences within the third grade music classroom when musical composition is utilized to increase of music literacy and knowledge for special needs students?”

I believe that many of the students who are to be the focus of my study already have the skills needed to create musical compositions. This can be shown through their ability to read musical notation, and participate successfully in other aspects of music class. It is my observation that there is a missing connection, which is needed for these students to become successful. Some of these students do eventually find this connection through scaffolded learning and are the able to demonstrating their understanding of composing and recording melodies, which are shared with the entire grade. It is one of the purposed of the this study, to discover the steps within the scaffolding which will aid these students develop their music literacy skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Music education has reached a crossroads in the United States. Feeling the monetary crunch of government regulations, school districts are forced to place programs such as music and the performing arts in curricular moratorium (MENC, n.d. A). Moreover, the standards and curricular goals of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), meant to unify and solidify music as a core subject area, have yet to be accomplished across the nation (MENC, n.d. B). It is the job of music educators, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade, to encourage the musical growth of children, thereby demonstrating the importance of musical knowledge within the daily curricula of all schools (MENC, n.d. B). Yet, there is an obvious disconnect between the MENC standards and curricular goals of music educators across the country (MENC, n.d. A). It will only be when music educators are building their curriculum from educational best practices and the learning of all aspects of music that the national standards will be met (MENC n.d. A).

### MENC Standards

The National Commission on Excellence in Education published its report entitled *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform* in 1984, and the ensuing curricular changes led to the largest reform of national education since the 1950s. Most prominent among these changes was the adoption of national educational standards during the early part of the next decade (Mark, 1996). In January of 1992 the MENC—now known as The National Association for Music Educators, joined the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National

Endowment for Humanities to begin the creation of the voluntary National Standards for Arts Education (MENC, n.d. A). Overseen by the National Committee for Standards in the Arts, the taskforce included education, art, government, and business representatives. Composed and organized into sections, K-4, 5-8, and 9-12, each contains specific standards for content area for achievement. After the circulation and revision of the standards to music educators in 1993, the national committee approved the arts standards on January 31, 1994 (MENC, n.d B).

The resulting standards for music education “suggest what every student in America should know and be able to do in music” (MENC, 1996, preface). In their publication of *Performance Standards for Music in 1996*, the MENC hoped to provide music educators with a guide as to how the national standards (see appendix A) should be applied within the curriculum as well as suggested assessment to measure students’ achievement (MENC, 1996). Performance standards make it clear that every student is able to learn music and can be aided appropriate assessment practices (MENC, 1996).

### **Current Practices in Music Education**

Within elementary general music, educators generally follow one of three music education methodolgies (AOSA, 2008). Orff and Orff Schulwerk is based on singing, chanting, rhymes, clapping, dancing, and keeping a beat on a variety of objects. The Orff educational style focuses first on the student’s ability to learn music by hearing and making music, and later, the reading and writing of music are introduced (AOSA, 2008). Many times songs are created for students by the music educator for the purpose of developing vocal and aural skills. These songs are then played by students on instruments specifically created for this method of teaching. Xylophones, metalaphones,

and glockenspiels (bells) are commonly used instruments in this form of teaching (AOSA, 2008). Through improvisation and composition, students within this method are able to develop a lifelong love and appreciation of music: “learning is meaningful only if it brings satisfaction to the learner, and satisfaction arises from the ability to use acquired knowledge for the purpose of creating” (AOSA, 2008).

The acquisition of music through listening and singing first, which can be found in the Orff Schulwerk approach, is also one of the core beliefs of the second methodology of music education known as the Kodály method. As stated by the Organization of American Kodály Educators, the Kodály approach “is a philosophy that integrates many of the best ideas, techniques, and approaches to music education. Based on singing, it is a comprehensive program that develops the ability to understand what is heard, then transfer that learning to reading, writing, improvisation, and composition” (OAKE, n.d.). The concepts and process of teaching in this methodology follow a specific order in which folk songs are used as the basis for students’ knowledge, thereby structuring rhythm and melody together into a series of musical experiences. Through the use of hand signs invented by Sarah Glover, and improved upon later by John Curwen, the Kodály approach introduces sight-reading through the translation of the notes on the staff to that of the physical gestures done by students’ hands (Mark, 1996). It is only once students have developed a proficient vocal knowledge base that they move on to learning instruments. As a result of the approach, students are able to sight-read music through the used of melodic syllables, rhythmic syllables, and hand signs, which also assists them in the analysis of form and harmony (Mark, 1996).

Dalcroze, the last of the three main music education methods, “teaches an understanding of music—(its) fundamental concepts, its expressive meaning, and its deep connections to other arts and human activities—through a pathbreaking approach incorporating rhythmic movement, aural training, and physical, vocal, and instrumental improvisation” (Dalcroze Society of America, n.d.). Divided into three components, *Eurhythmics* (improvised movement to musical expression, rhythm, and structure), *Solfège* (a system of syllables used in the identification of pitch while singing), and *Improvisation* (the spontaneous creation of movement or music) make up the structure of student learning. It is through this process that students are able to relate their movements to the pitches, dynamics, forms, structures, and rhythms being heard. Through this process, students are then able to transfer what they have learned about music into an ability to read, write, perform, and listen to music, thus ensuring that the whole musician is educated (Mark, 1996). Of the three philosophies of education, Dalcroze is the only one that naturally includes the adaptation of instruction for students with disabilities (Mark, 1996).

### **Meeting the MENC Standards**

Within each of these three music education philosophies is a focus of music literacy, or the ability to use the multiple skills of performance, reading and writing music, oral/aural, critical thinking, and interpretation to communicate through music (Barrett, 1997). This is accomplished through the use of a curriculum focusing on core skills which all musicians must have in order to be successful (Byrn, Halliday, Sheridan, Soden, and Hunter, 2001). The basis for music literacy as identified through Kodály, Orff, and Dalcroze is the use of a rhythmic counting system in which students will be

able to identify various notes through symbols and counting methods (Ester, 2006). Students are then able to transfer the skills of singing and performing various songs learned, which in turn are then applied to the skills of reading and writing music. As the students grow as musicians, the systems of remembering the information gives way to total music literacy (Ester et. al., 2006).

Despite the focus on music literacy from the varied philosophies, as well as the MENC Standards, classroom teachers have not always focused on students' abilities to use all of their skills to demonstrate their music literacy through composition (Strand, 2006). Katherine Strand (2006), found in her survey of 339 music educators that while "88.5% of the respondents indicated that they incorporated composition, only 5.9% reported using composition tasks often" (p.1). Such findings suggest little focus on MENC national standard four, "composing and arranging music within specified guidelines," as well as several other standards including, five, "reading and notation music," and six "listening to, analyzing and describing music" (MENC, 1996, preface). While Strand found that there were some teachers who use composition in various forms, educators who did implement composition did so on a limited basis (Strand, 2006). The rationales provided for the lack of the application of composition in Strand's (2006) study varied from lack of time, insufficient classroom size, lack of funding and proper equipment, to the belief that composition is inappropriate for the content area of music.

Claims such as the ones presented in Strand's paper, were the focus of the MENC task force on national standards created in 2006. The task force of 2006 collected data via e-mail and the MENC website from 750 music educators (MENC, 2007). "In general the data gathered confirm that the National Standards are believed by music

educators to represent highly desirable goals and they are considered to have a significant positive influence on music education” (MENC, 2007, paragraph 10). This can be seen by the application of the MENC national standards to state level standards of music education. However, the data collected also revealed numerous misunderstandings of the purpose of the standards (MENC, 2007). Many respondents stated concerns with the ability to achieve the standards, as well as a lack of time during classes, and the lack of training and education. The survey results suggested that the achievement standards of 1994 be revised because the educational climate of 1994 was different than today’s (MENC, 2007). While the nine content standards are still current and function well, according to the MENC panel, it was suggested that a board be created for the revision of these standards. Despite these alterations, change will not come quickly or easily (MENC, 2007).

### **Music Literacy in the General Music Classroom**

According to Barrett (1997), general music classroom educators have been challenged since at least the mid-1980s to identify the best approaches to teaching music literacy. With constant change in styles, notation, forms, instrumentation, and performance, students must still develop the aural, spatial, and visual perceptions so they may better understand and analyze written music. Music literacy has been defined as the ability to apply and use conventional notation to playing an instrument. This definition of music literacy ensures the encoding and decoding of music by the performers as was expected in western music for centuries. However, this definition neglects the oral traditions of music, which does not have written manuscripts for musicians to learn, analyze, and perform (Barrett, 1997). It is because of this that music educators must look

beyond the written note, to understand that music literacy encompasses skills far beyond the reading and writing of music. With music educators focusing on the processes of mastering the tools of reading and writing music notation in combination with the aural and oral traditions of music, students will begin to acquire music literacy (Barrett, 1997).

Music educators observe that it is only when students have developed a strong relationship between aural (speaking/singing) and oral (listening) processes and reading and writing music, that their music literacy skills are established (Taesch, 2008). “In America, the instrument is the primary focus. It is the toy—the material object that captures the interest” (Taesch, 2008, p.2). It is only when students are allowed the process of learning the sound of notes and the look of notes prior to playing an instrument that students’ music literacy become more fluent. However, educators must be cautious not to begin teaching students solely by ear. It is when students are taught in this manner that they will only develop half of the whole equation for total music literacy (Taesch, 2008).

Much like an author at a book reading, once a musician develops and begins to master the skills of music literacy, he or she is then able to communicate with an audience as evidenced by an orchestra or choir performance. It is through this process that musicians begin to multi-task their skills while presenting their interpretation of the music they have learned (Barrett, 2008). This process, in which a student develops an interpretation of the written note, reflection on the sound, and responding with emotion of the music, is music literacy in action. According to Barrett (2008), “The experience of music takes place over a specific period of time and requires the participant to retain

large amounts of information in memory whilst simultaneously processing further incoming information” (p. 43).

### **Scaffolding**

The use of scaffolding is most closely associated with constructivist learning theory, which is the belief that learners construct knowledge from personal experience (Ormrod, 2003). While students may be taught in ways that support their self-construction of knowledge, it has been observed that their knowledge may not be an accurate representation of the real world (Ormrod, 2003; Van Der Stuyf, 2002). The psychologist Lev Vygotsky identified the zone of proximal development, which proposes that students will not learn from repetitive activities, but rather from solving more challenging tasks with the guidance of a more knowledgeable individual (Ormrod, 2003). It is in response to Vygotsky’s view of learning that educators may begin to develop the scaffolding, or processes of learning for students to follow during a lesson or unit plan. In the beginning stages of scaffolding, the teacher might provide directions for students to follow, demonstrate the expected outcomes, provide goals, and ask questions which guide students through the various problems (Ormrod, 2003; Van Der Stuyf, 2002). Throughout the lessons and units, as students become more knowledgeable, the teacher will begin to slowly remove the additional support. It is through the removal of the scaffolding, that students will begin to demonstrate their independence and abilities to complete the assigned tasks on their own (Van Der Stuyf, 2002).

The use of scaffolding can be applied nicely to the realm of music education, and more specifically music literacy. Since musical works are multidimensional pieces, they can be analyzed from various perspectives and dimensions, which forces students to work

and think on a much more expansive level than the traditional methods would require (Wiggins, 2007). The best way to develop the three learning levels of music (performing, listening, and creating) is to call upon the aural traditions of folk music (Wiggins, 2007). It is through this route that students can begin to develop listening skills and can create music more naturally. Classrooms, that utilize scaffolding practices can provide students with the opportunity to apply their music literacy through the use of creative composition. Students can then share their knowledge and creativity in front of the entire class, with the teacher, or within a small group. Sharing musical compositions demonstrates the students' ability to use their aural and oral skills, as well as their knowledge of reading and writing music notation. Interacting with one another and learning in this manner also demonstrate students' ability to learn independently from the teacher, thereby demonstrating the latter stages of scaffolding where teachers play a supportive role rather than that of a director (Byrne, Halliday, Sheridan, Soden, Hunter, 2001).

#### **Definition of Bloom's Taxonomy**

Within carefully scaffolded lessons, students should, over time, have the opportunity to meet the six levels of Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives (Lord, 2003). The purpose of this framework is to serve as a tool for learning goals and as a way for determining the objectives of activities, tests, units, and curriculum (Krathwohl, 2002). The levels of Blooms taxonomy, *knowledge* (the recalling and remembering of information), *comprehension* (understanding and interpreting information), *application* (the demonstration and correct use of knowledge), *analysis* (the ability to differentiate the various principals of information to understand the overall structure), *synthesis* (drawing upon past knowledge to create new ideas or thoughts), and

*evaluation* (creating judgments on information), are placed in order from the simplest to the more complex (Lord, 2003). As originally applied, Bloom's Taxonomy, was often believed to be a hierarchy that required each step to be a prerequisite for the next (Krathwohl, 2002). This was due to the unfamiliar terms applied throughout, as well as educators' misinterpretation of the various levels, thus leading educators to create curricular objectives, which focused on the knowledge and comprehension levels with not enough on the synthesis level of the taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). Successors to Bloom have since edited the original taxonomy so that it provides more than one dimension to objectives and activities. This was done through renaming and revising the original six levels of the cognitive taxonomy as *remember* ("retrieving relevant knowledge from long-term memory"), *understand*, ("determining the meaning of instructional message"), *apply* ("carrying out or using a procedure in a given situation"), *analyze* ("breaking material into its constituent parts and detecting how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose"), *evaluate* ("making judgments based on criteria and standards"), and *create* ("putting element together to form a novel, coherent whole or make an original product") (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 215). It was through this process, that the renamed terms with updated definitions were rearranged to place *create*, previously known as *synthesis*, as the sixth and highest step within the taxonomy. It was also with the renaming of these terms, that the taxonomy was given a second cognitive dimension, identifying forms of learning within each level. This is best demonstrated in the knowledge level, where there are now four secondary knowledge dimension to be identified. These include, *factual knowledge* ("The basic elements that students must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems in it"),

*conceptual knowledge* (“The interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function together”), *procedural knowledge* (“How to do something; methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods), *metacognitive knowledge* (“Knowledge for cognition in general as well as awareness and knowledge of one’s own cognition”) (Krathwohl, 2002, p.214). With the renaming of the terms, the vocabulary within Bloom’s Taxonomy makes it more approachable and useable in an everyday setting to the everyday educator. The use of Bloom’s taxonomy to help educators scaffold learning has provided educators with an important scaffolding framework to restructure lessons and curriculum to better suite the needs of their students (Krathwohl, 2002).

### **The Scaffolding of Music Literacy**

#### ***Stage One: Improvisation and Musical Play***

To begin the scaffolding for music literacy, students must be allowed to explore music from a very young age. This process is much like that of learning a language. Prior to developing an ability to read and write, one must first be able to speak fluently (Bozung, 1996). This skill acquisition should also be applied to students within the music classroom. Beginning students should be provided the time during class to play with instruments and develop an understanding of them prior to learning their proper use. It is through musical play, that students can freely explore the sounds of various instruments and come to initial understandings of sound, rhythm, timbre and dynamics (Bozung, 1996). Through the application of knowledge, from the outside world to musical settings, teachers can encourage musical play. Through the use of sounds made

by the rain, wind, birds, frogs, and insects, students will be able to create whole compositions during musical play just by pretending to make a rainstorm (Bozung, 1996).

As students begin to master the skills within musical play, the teacher will begin to challenge the students to improvise music through singing and the playing of instruments. It is through the acquisition of these skills that students will develop as individual song makers and simultaneously practice the communicative skills of music literacy (Barrett, 2006). In her study on student-invented song, Margaret Barrett makes a strong case for the importance of invented or improvised song in a student's musical development. The study was designed to examine the activities and music of children within pre-literate kindergarten classes where students took on the role of "composers, song makers, and notators" (Barrett, 2002, p. 207). The ethnographic case study took place over a two-year period studying two kindergarten classes in two different K-6 buildings with an enrollment of twenty to forty students in each class. The schools were located in suburban and semi-rural communities with building populations of 600 and 675, respectively. During the study, Barrett developed a music corner within each of the classrooms, which included a collection of percussion instruments, paper, and texts. This corner was then integrated into the morning learning stations of each classroom. Information was collected "fortnightly" from each classroom, where children initiated interactions and choose the duration of their time together (Barrett, 2002, p. 207). Along with this music corner, students also participated in daily singing activities, which included action songs, counting songs, and alphabet songs. Barrett notes that the music corner was located outside of the music classroom, which restricted the interactions she was able to have with the students in each of the classes. Through her collected data,

Barrett discovered the wide array of students' abilities to create their own music and concluded that "the key characteristics of elaboration, or those of 'repetition, accentuation, theme and variation, anticipation, surprise, building to a climax and resolution', may be developed through careful attention to and valuing of invented song as it occurs in children's individual and joint music making" (Barrett, 2002, p. 218).

It is once students have developed the skills to improvise and create their own melodies, that they are ready to be introduced to music notation. This process of introducing written notes should begin with rhythmic notation. According to Paananen (2006), the rhythmic productions of children are formed from birth to eleven years of age. Children will go through various stages, which are identified as *sensorimotor* ("the [development of] relations of the general parametrical changes of sound") which develops between four to eighteen months of age, *relational* ("the [development of] polar relations between and within musical patterns") which develops between the ages of one to five, and *dimensional* ("when hierarchical relations of the musical event structure develop") which occurs between the ages of five to eleven (Paananen, 2006, p. 352). As students progress through the stages of learning and understanding rhythmic notation, they then are able to apply it to their prior knowledge, thus ensuring creative music making (Paananen, 2006). With the mastery of rhythm, students can then develop simple rhythmic melodies for instruments, thus demonstrating their readiness to begin more difficult tasks.

### ***Stage Two: Reading the Music Notation***

It is once students have developed the skills of improvisation that music educators are able to implement scaffolding for the continued development of a student's

music literacy. These skills begin in kindergarten with simple rhythmic and symbolic notation. Claudia Glushankof (2002) best demonstrates this within her study on musical styles of kindergarten children. It was Glushankof's hypothesis to identify the characteristics of children's music and classify the style into a distinct genre separate from adult composition. She conducted her study within two separate free flow structured kindergarten classrooms in Israeli schools with several five to seven year-old students who had been attending the school for two or more years. All students who participated in the study had chosen the music composition corner of their classroom during free play. Glushankof observed students during their composition play to identify the materials used during composition, rules of composition, and characteristics of style applied within the compositions of all participating students.

She collected data by videotaping the students performing their compositions in concert for their classmates. Other data consisted of student compositions, which may have been written down by the students in rhythmic notation or symbolically (non-traditional music notation) prior to performance. Glushankof found that by the end of the study, students used two or more instruments within each of their compositions, and a majority of the students used a combination of pitched and unpitched instruments in combination. Students also employed repetition of rhythms and pitches within a duple meter. Students were also likely to use progressive rhythms, meter, and pitch alteration, generally more likely to be found in adult non-Western music. Little deviation was noticed in the use of dynamics within the students' compositions. Glushankof determined that the motifs as well as characteristics of style identified throughout the student composition generally did not resemble the music presented by music and

classroom teachers. Hence, Glushankof concluded that the music children produce of their own accord should be placed within its own genre and be used to aid in the balance of enculturation and personal expression.

With this recognition of students' symbolic notation we may begin to introduce a more extensive approach to rhythmic notation. During this process music educators use combinations of various approaches within the classroom leading to the development of a rhythmic counting system (Ester, 2006). It is understood that the basis of these counting systems which were beat oriented, meaning that all symbols used should be correlated to a specific beat or duration (Strad 2007). Therefore, a quarter note in common (four-four) time will mean the same as a half note in cut (two-two) time. In so doing, students can develop a vocabulary, which will relate sounds to the symbols (Ester, 2006). By mastering understanding and application of counting rhythmic notation, students will be able to transfer the information to instruments and the various staves used within the general music classroom (Ester, 2006).

It is with the mastery of these skills that students will be able to participate in what is known as sight-reading. "The unrehearsed performance of music, so-called sight-reading, is a skill required by all musicians" (Kopiez & Lee, 2006, p. 97). Through sight-reading, students begin to improve their music literacy skills. In participating in this practice, students are further able to develop reading and performance of written notation, while simultaneously using aural skills to evaluate the music that was just produced (Kopiez & Lee, 2006; Frith, Hensin, Kampe, Stewart, Walsk, & Turner, 2003). In order to ensure student mastery of this skill, it is important that music educators use a varied approach to sight-reading, which include a combination of both musical and non-musical

skills. In so doing, students will become musicians who will be able to perform in various settings comfortably (Kopiez & Lee, 2006).

### ***Stage Three: Composing***

After students are able to read and perform music, they will be able move towards the composition of their own music. It is important to note that during this time, teachers must begin to remove themselves from the student activities (Dogani, 2004). In order to begin this process, teachers must set guidelines for students to follow throughout the composing process (Strad, 2007). This is accomplished through the composition and then sharing of simple and meaningful melodies in a group setting (and before students work on an individual basis). In participating in this activity, students can understand the importance of themes and their variations through the music being composed (Williamson, 2007). Once a sample activity is completed, it is important that the teacher create a rubric or checklist outlining the goals and expectations of composition (Hickey, 1999). Providing these materials to students ensures that the teacher and students are involved in a student-centered learning process, which although being both creative and explorative, also enables the teacher to assess the final outcome (Brown, 2008; Hickey, 1999). This will also allow students the freedom, flexibility and time to work alone (and with others) and to write and edit and revise their works (Williamson, 2007; Strand, 2007).

Since student composition activities are a creative process built on the knowledge of music literacy, students must be allowed the independent time to build a melody with the teacher participating in a supportive or scaffolding role (Dogani, 2004; Strand, 2007; Brown, 2008). This process demonstrates the application of a new version of the music

literacy scaffolding in which students are able work in a more independent manner. In so doing, students are provided an opportunity to learn how to compose music while implementing their music literacy skills through listening to, reading, and analyzing the performances of other students compositions as well as their own (Dogani, 2004; Brown, 2008). It is imperative for teachers to encourage experimentation and composition without resorting solely to teacher-directed instruction, which may prevent student-centered learning within the expressive arts (Dogani, 2004; Brown, 2008). It is when students are instructed solely through teacher-directed instruction that they are unable to apply their music literacy skills independently. This in turn, limits the students' abilities to meet the high levels of thought within Bloom's taxonomy. If students are unable to reach the levels of creating, evaluating, and analyzing, music literacy goals will not be met. Only within these higher levels, will students be able to apply music literacy through the use of their aural/oral and performance skills as well as their ability to read and write musical notation (Dogani, 2004).

### **Inclusion in the Music Classroom**

Throughout the process of learning within the music classroom, teachers must be conscious of students identified with special needs. With the 1997 amendment to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, schools are required to provide individualized education programs, (I.E.P.s), to students identified within the special education program. Later bills and amendments such as the 2004 IDEA or Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act have since expanded this federal mandate. The implication of these bills and amendments has expanded the requirement and accommodations expected within students I.E.P.s. In many cases the accommodations

provided through students' I.E.P.s will include their participation in the general curriculum of the school they attend (Soukup, Bashinski, Bovaird, & Wehmeyer, 2007). This inclusion of students has been found to increase their exposure to the general education curriculum; however many adaptations must be made so that all students will have the opportunity to become successful (Soukup at al., 2007; Griffiths, 2006).

The pedagogical method of differentiated instruction, which provides all students with an inclusive learning atmosphere and encourages their success, is the most strongly recommended way to ensure effective inclusion (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2004). It is through this practice that educators support the learning of all students through scaffolding and engagement of students in their own learning (Broderick et al., 2004). This can be accomplished both through encouraging students to take calculated risks and ensuring the teachers' support throughout the processes. Through the implementation of this process, differences are to be seen as ordinary and expected. In using this process, the teacher should tailor the education provided to support the needs of all (McLesky & Waldron, 2002; McLesky & Waldron, 2007).

The effect inclusion has on special needs students can best be seen through the behavior and attitude towards school and learning. Griffiths (2006) conducted a study with two groups of thirteen eighth grade students with general learning disabilities. The first group consisted of students who were included into the general curriculum of their school, while the second group was held within a self-contained classroom. When compared, students who were included into the general curriculum had a stronger sense of belonging and social understanding, while students contained within their own classroom felt a disconnect from the outside world of learning (Griffiths, 2006). While

the scores of included special needs students were not as high as those who were in isolated classrooms, their confidence and attitude towards school was much more positive. The students who were placed within an isolated classroom while attaining the goals of their I.E.P.s had a noticeable gap in the understanding of the general curriculum, as well as a lack of understanding of the social workings of the general education classroom. These noticeable differences often led to a lack of self-confidence and frustration towards school and the learning process (Griffiths, 2006).

Inclusion within the music classroom has been most notably observed within the areas of performance, primarily performing ensembles, where students with special needs are able to perform as part of a larger group. The success of this inclusion is provided through flexible adaptable practices within the rehearsals. Students with physical disabilities are provided differentiated seating, stands, instruments, as well as additional time for practice and instruction. These accommodations extend to the use of Braille music for the blind, and specifically written and arranged music for musicians with reading and learning disabilities. It is through such accommodations that a student with special needs is able to develop a stronger sense of confidence within himself or herself as a person and as a learner (Haywood, 2006). It is important to note that while inclusive practices and accommodations have been observed to encourage success within the general music room, more information is needed on successful inclusionary practices to support music literacy.

### **Technology**

Technology within the composition of a piece provides students with opportunities to create music, which may not have been possible otherwise. Through the

use of programs such as Band in a Box, Garage Band, and many others, students are able to compose melodies through sound bites and various other recordings (Savage, 2003). When authentic use of technology is incorporated within the music classroom, students will have the opportunity to compose within the specified guidelines of a teacher's rubric. Once a composition is underway, students can immediately replay what was just written so they may reflect upon the piece and can also use the listening skills developed in earlier stages of the learning process (Savage, 2003). This style of composition allows students to compose in multimodal forms, which are understood by students but which may be too advanced to be written on paper (Gall & Breeze, 2005).

These opportunities, in turn, can provide students with disabilities a chance to compose independently with instant feedback from their computer. Students with reading disabilities best illustrate this. While hindered by the reading and writing of musical notation, the computer technology provides them with an opportunity to visually apply their aural and oral music literacy skills through the use of the computer screen and computer speakers, thereby allowing the students to compose a piece of music which can be heard and understood by the entire class (Reimer 1997; Savage, 2003). This may also be integrated into classroom songs when students have difficulty singing. Students who are uncomfortable with reading and singing may develop harmonies and accompaniments for the rest of the class. Through the application of the computer software, all students are involved in a performance of a song, including those students who otherwise would have been uncomfortable or unable to sing the songs without the aid of technology (Siegel, 2004). Often with this newfound confidence, all students are then able to develop multimedia portfolios, which may include many other projects such as movies and CD

sound tracks (Gall & Breeze, 2005). The application of technology can support all students to succeed in an area of music literacy where they might otherwise have had great difficulty (Griffiths, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Only when the world of music education begins to provide a well-scaffolded curriculum that meets the needs of all students will true music literacy for all students finally be achieved. The independent learning and differentiated instruction of lessons and units will then encourage students of all abilities to seek out areas of music which they find interesting (MENC, 2007). In offering these opportunities at a young age, students will grow to become appreciative learners, consumers, listeners, and performers of music. Once these goals are met, the nine national standards of the MENC will be properly applied to the curriculum (MENC, 2007). “Until we do that, many students will have to look outside our classrooms to satisfy their music interests, and when this happens, formal music education becomes irrelevant” (MENC, 2007, paragraph 57).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Question**

What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences within the third grade music classroom when musical composition is utilized to increase music literacy and knowledge for special needs students?

### **Procedure**

Prior to the start of my data collection, I received permission from the Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) to carry out this study (See Appendix B). My school principal completed an administrator consent form since this study took place during the course of school year and on school premises with students from our building (See Appendix C). Potential student participants also received a consent form, which had to be completed by their parents or legal guardians (See Appendix D). By using these consent forms, I ensured that all people involved were aware of and agreed to my research plans.

Through the course of the study, I met with the third grade classes once during each five-day cycle for forty five minutes. During this time, students were instructed through specifically created scaffolding for the education of music literacy. Each lesson consisted of specified overall objectives pertaining to music literacy which were included in lesson. Throughout the process, students participated in various individual and group activities, which assisted them in their learning of musical notation. Examples of such activities included group composing with flashcards, various assigned sight reading activities, and creative composing activities ranging from rhythmic to treble staff composition.

### **Class Interviews**

To begin and end the collection of data, I conducted a class interviews with each of the four third grade classes. The first interview was designed to gain insight on students' knowledge and understanding of musical composition. (See Appendix G). In addition to serving this purpose, questions also served as a way to spark students' thoughts and opinions on what musical composition and music literacy mean to them. At the conclusion of the study, I asked the same questions again to the four third grade classes. Throughout the processes, I followed and adapted the model of open ended questioning and informal interviewing set by Holly Arhar and Kasten (2005), by creating a line of questioning is related to the topic allowing student responses to determine the next question. According to Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005), "Questions can be open-ended, eliciting responses without shaping them, or closed, thus limiting the responses to the choices provided" (p. 165). I opted to develop an open ended list of questions to encourage students to express various opinions and feelings on their learning (See Appendix G). During the interview, I created a running record of the group's discussion in an outline form, making sure to document the words of the students through prominent quotes stated as well as themes and concepts, which developed through discussion. Immediately following the interview, I turned the raw notes into a fully detailed field log entry.

### **Observational Checklist**

After studying the third grade curriculum, I also created a checklist containing specified behaviors and learning benchmarks students are expected to meet. To do so, I followed the guidelines of Cher Hendricks (2006), who suggests that checklists and lists

should observe specified behaviors and the number of times such behaviors were exhibited during a class period. In creating this observational system, I was able to maintain a running record of all students and their progress on various objectives and how well they met specific instructional goals throughout the data collection period.

### **Field Notes**

Throughout this study, I kept a researcher's log, which contained my observations of students and their interactions as well as my personal thoughts. According to Hendricks (2006), a researcher's log is the most important data collection tool. In order to maintain a record of classroom activities and student response, I jotted down raw notes for each class session and turned the notes into a narrative on my computer as soon as possible after each lesson occurred as possible. Through this narrative format, I was able to record the behavior of students, the classroom environment and its effect on the lesson, as well as observer's reflections. Once drafted, I re-read the entry and separated my observer's comments, or reflections, from the observed student behaviors by surrounding observer's comments with brackets as suggested by Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1998).

In addition to a continuous researcher's log, I kept a record of the dates, lesson concepts, and student activities, which were used during the study. In keeping these records of my research, I was able to reflect upon log entries and correlate the data collected with the activities the students were to be participating in during that particular lesson.

### **Student Work**

Student-created work served as an important data set for this study. Musical compositions created by students over the course of the study provide a fluid stream of skill development from the beginning of the school year until the end of the intervention. In using rubrics to maintain a valid measure of students' development through summative style assessment, students were able to provide a measure, or litmus test as to their abilities and what needed to be adapted throughout the intervention.

### **Trustworthiness**

In order for my study to be credible and trustworthy in all areas, I had to begin by requesting the consent from the parents and guardians of the participating classes (See Appendix D). Within the consent letter, I provided a summarized explanation of the study and shared my commitment to maintain each child's anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. The letter also informed parents or guardians of their right to withdraw their child from the study at any given point without penalty to that student. I also provided contact information in the event that they wished to discuss any facet of the study with me.

Throughout the study I worked to ensure sufficient triangulation by gathering information from numerous data collection sources (Johnson, 1997). Including students' compositions, interviews, field notes, as well as various formative performance assessments collected throughout the study. To ensure that this triangulation was met, I would meet weekly with an inquiry group who provided new insights and guidance throughout the process (Ely et. al., 2006). I also worked to ensure that students' voice and my own through various reflective journals, as well as shadow logs, pastiches, and

materials (student created objects) helping to guarantee reflexivity within my study (Johnson, 1997). Throughout the collection of these materials, I ensured to involve the participating students through sharing my observations and log entries in various participant checks to ensure that the students had their voice correctly shared through my writings (Holly et. al., 2005).

To provide me with the data and information required for my intervention, I also researched current literature in the fields of music education, special education, music theory, and educational philosophy. Through reading and familiarizing myself with this literature, I developed a literature review based these materials (Hendricks, 2006). With this information I developed scaffolding for all lessons and units to support students as they were learning how to read and write music in various settings.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

Throughout the course of my data collection, I maintained a field log, which I wrote the day-to-day activities of events in narrative form as well as interviews and dialogue, which went on between students and myself. It was also within my log that I wrote reflective memos, which focused on my teaching as well as students' work, interaction, and class participation. The log also included analytic memos on the work I had collected from the students during the study. These memos provided insights into the students' learning throughout the study and allowed me to keep track of what need to be altered in the scaffolding strategies process so students would become successful musicians.

According to Ely et al. (1998), "The interweaving of data collection and analysis is highly transactional, each activity shedding new light on and enriching the other." (p.

165). To do just that, as I wrote in my log, I would re-read all I had written jotting down what Arhar, Holly and Kasten (2001) describe as “ideas, issues, themes or dilemmas” which initially then became the main codes (words or phrases to identify reoccurring themes) of the study (p. 194). Throughout the processes of creating these themes, I developed a coding index where similar codes and themes could then be tied together in a graphic organizer (Ely et al., 1998). Through this process, I was able to develop theme statements to describe my findings in a structured, clear, and precise manner (See Figure 1).

As I conducted my study, I also read the educational philosophy of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and analyzed my data through a social constructivist lens. It was while I read Vygotsky’s philosophy, that I related key Vygotskian concepts directly to my study and wrote a detailed reflective memo, which helped me think about how deeply his work impacted my study. This led me to new ideas and directions as well as guided me to new revelations in my study that may not have been apparent otherwise.

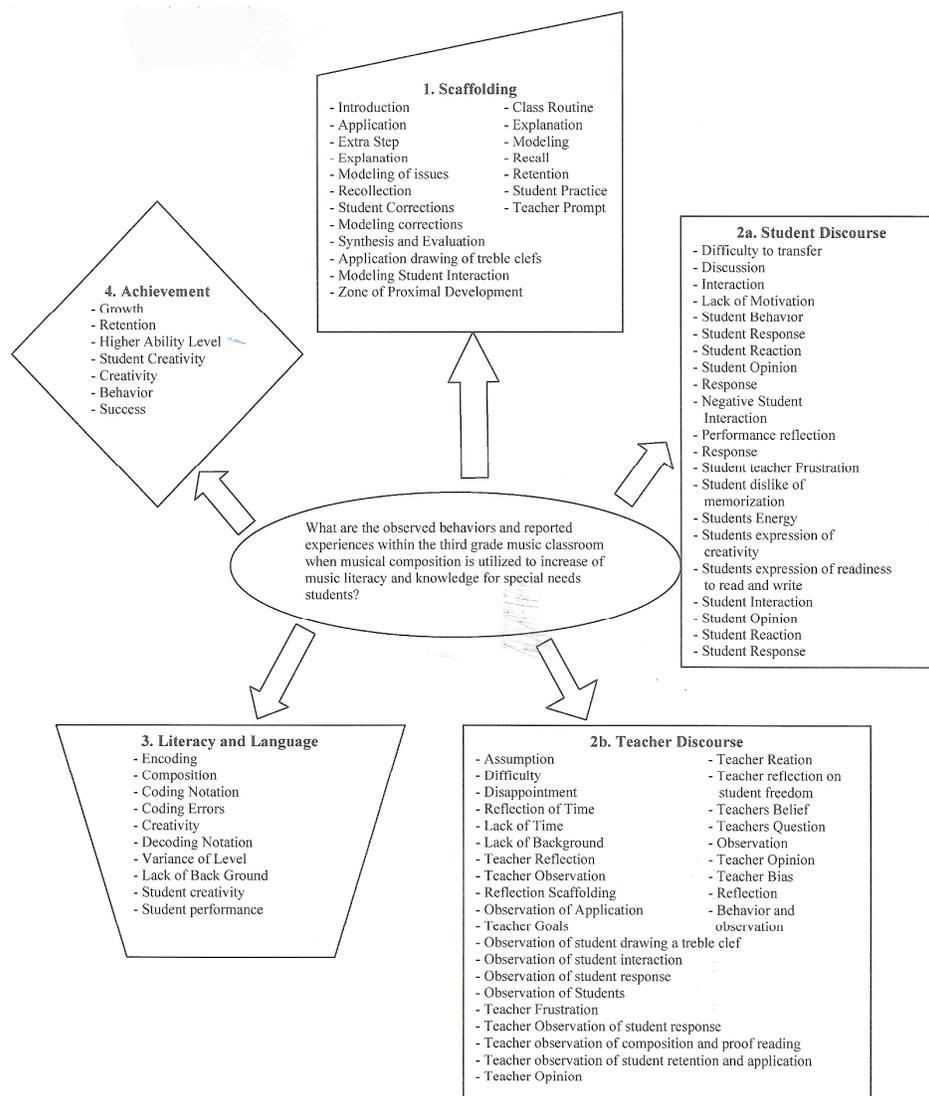


Figure 1: research question and coding bins

## **THIS YEAR'S STORY**

### **What am I going to Do?**

It's early September, and I am reading through the lists of students in the third grade classes that I will be teaching this year. As I review the roster of 90 or so students, I am happy to see the familiar names, eager to meet the students attached to the unfamiliar ones, and I lament over the missing names of the students who will no longer be a part of my school's community. My small school district of three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school, has gone through many changes. Redistricting of the elementary schools and the effects of the economic downturn have lowered the population of my elementary school from nearly six hundred students last year to 458 students this year. After wrapping my head around the logistics of class sizes and classroom organization, I look at my class lists and think about how to approach my intervention in third grade.

The point of my study is to observe the growth of music literacy within all third grade students, including the students with disabilities. Looking at the class lists, I noticed that many of the students I wish to support, including Gared, Peter, Steve, Abbey and some others are all in one class. I began to ponder. "I must include everyone in the class, but what about the other three third grade classes? Should I do all four third grade classes so that I can see how it affects the entire grade?" I knew that this would be a massive undertaking, but I also knew that by including all students, I would ensure that all students in all classes benefit from the prescribed music education curriculum.

"So.... Where do I begin?" I thought to myself. Reflecting on past years, I recalled that students, all students, seem to develop a seasonal amnesia from their

summer break. The challenge then becomes, how do I get everyone back to a learning frame of mind quickly so that we can get to the task at hand? I made the decision; we need to start at the very beginning, the first building block of learning written music. This meant rhythm, reviewing and adding past knowledge and new concepts all at the same time, so students would have no choice but to reflect on what they already learned on our music literacy journey.

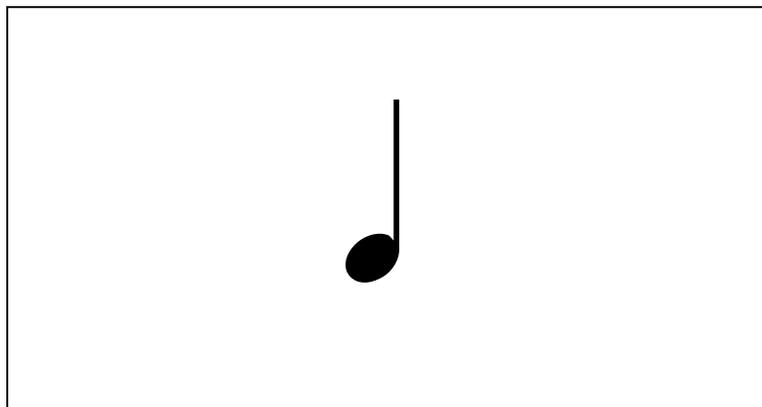
### **In the Beginning There was Rhythm**

And so it began. As each class came in during the first week, I saw that many students had matured in their behaviors from the end of last year. Excited, many of them noticed the changes to the classroom that had been made over the summer months. The shiny wooden floors, the addition of a large storage closet, and bright new paper on the bulletin boards were quick opening discussion points with the students as they entered the room and were assigned their seats for the first half of the school year. Placing the students in their seats, I began to see the evolution of the students' personalities. Each class had its own cast of characters, which I would have to attend to as students developed their learning in their own unique style throughout the year. I observe Gared and Peter, who had experienced past difficulties with reading and writing, and I made sure to keep them separated in the seating. Kevin, identified with Asperger's syndrome, loves music, but at the start of this New Year, he had seemed distraught and unable to focus. Nate, a bright little boy who is very quiet, but willing to work hard, was in his spot already, and I could tell he was already dreading being called on. Steve, a boy who loves music and is eager to learn everything he can about music, had experienced difficulties in reading, but I had little experience or observation of this difficulty in the music room up

to this point. There was also Fred, a gifted and talented student identified with a G.I.E.P or gifted individual education plan who claimed to know a great deal about music, but has, in the past, had great difficulty understanding that not all activities are a competition. Constantly wanting to be first, Fred often vies to be the smartest while not being the focus of attention. Despite the fact that these students are spread among four different classes, I looked forward to how their learning would develop throughout the year ahead.

After the rush of seeing the students and the changes to the classroom, we got started. “I am working on how to become a better teacher to all of you, and I would like you to help me,” I explained to each class. I attempted to introduce the students to the study in a way that they would be able to understand what was going to happen throughout the course of the fall and winter months. Through a short discussion, I explained how they would be in my story, and how what we did would not only make me a better teacher, but also hopefully encourage them to learn more and enjoy it.

Moving on, the students and I began to review the names of musical notation from the past year. “OK! Who remembers what this note is called?” I said as I held up a flashcard with an image of a quarter note on it (See Figure 2). Some of the students were eager to dive head first into their past knowledge, much as if it were a swimming pool on the first day of summer. This was in contrast, though, to the majority of the students who seemed to have had no recollection of what a quarter note was. In the sea of eager, terrified, and indifferent faces, I heard a voice call out, “It’s a quarter note Mr. Becker.” It was Fred smiling at his classmates and at me. I was happy that Fred was participating; however, I was concerned that starting out the year calling out could lead to greater issues later on, but I let it pass so as not to squelch his enthusiasm.



*Figure 2:* flashcard

The activity continued on as we pressed through the notations the students had learned before and would use this year again. I could see most students visually became more comfortable as they began to recognize familiar musical notation. It seemed that all it took was for them to recognize one symbol, and the knowledge would rush back to them. This was very evident in Peter and Kevin, who seemed to have just woken up half way through this activity. Very happily they volunteered every bit of knowledge they had concerning rhythmic notation. Kevin was most insistent on being able to answer questions that were asked of him. During a lull in his response, a classmate attempted to help him and was promptly shut down. “I WANT TO ANSWER IT MYSELF!!!!” he shouted to his classmate and proceeded not only to identify a half note, but also to demonstrate its duration. Eagerly, I placed the notation into a simple pattern in a large blue pocket chart hanging on my wall (See Figure 3). “Lets’ see if we can all read and clap this rhythm.” Roughly the students clapped the rhythm placed in front of them. While there were many mistakes, I could see that the students were working hard to recall

all they had learned the year before so that they could perform what I had just placed in the big blue pocket chart.



*Figure 3:* pocket chart

Two more tries later, the students had performed the rhythm in manner unison and demonstrated their ability to work together to create music at sight.

At our second class a week later, we are still focusing on rhythmic notation. To encourage their growth in their comfort and ability to identify musical notation, I created a new game for them to play. After starting with our weekly rhythmic sight-reading activity, reading a composed rhythm from the blue pocket chart, I began to explain the game. “The game is find the note,” I announced, as I taped quarter notes, half notes, eighth notes, and quarter rests to students’ backs. “What you are to do is walk around the room and ask students if you have the same note as they do. Once you find someone who does, you have to go find a spot to sit down with your partner,” I explained. Holding up the various symbols, I asked students if they would be able to identify them.

Kevin raised his hand with excited vigor, only to forget what he was going to say once I called on him. I allowed him to think for a little while, remembering the rule of eight suggesting that I silently count to eight in your head before assisting the student, something that always seemed to work well for Kevin. After an unsuccessful attempt, I moved on to another student identified it correctly as a quarter note. I observed that Jared did not have the same issue as Kevin did when asked to identify musical notation during this activity. He was able to identify the quarter rest without any difficulty, while his classmate Peter seemed to struggle. The day of this activity, Peter was more focused on the fact that I was wearing my glasses instead of the activity that was about to unfold.

With directions explained, and students as focused as I could hope for on the second week of school, I released them to play the game. It was my hope that through the process, the students would interact with each other not only identifying the notation on each other's backs, but also creating dialogue that would be necessary for some of the activities later on in the semester. Many of the students were able to receive answers to the notation taped upon their backs. Despite how well the activity seemed to be going, I could see that some students were struggling. Peter, Kevin, and Jared all seemed to be doing well in this activity, but students like Steve were having some difficulties. "I know how to perform them, I just don't remember what they are called," Steve told me when I asked him what I could do to help. I could see how frustrated he was becoming as more and more students completed the activity, and he was still looking for his partner. It was during this time, that I did some quick remediation with Steve. He was reversing notations such as quarter and half notes. Since it was an issue with naming the various notations, Steve and I worked on his ability to identify through two or three

different learning styles including; learning keys, acronyms, and writing practice on a small whiteboard. Within a minute Steven found another person with the same note and identify it without any assistance.

Once everyone had successfully found a person who had the same note taped to his or her back, I began to go through each group and ask them to identify what note or rest they were. The results were a mixed review of success, and while several groups were able to identify that they were a quarter note or a half note, other groups were paired correctly but under the assumption that they were a different note. When asked, Peter stated that the quarter rest attached to his back was in truth a squiggly line note, to which his partner Abby agreed. Abby traditionally had difficulties in school. While she was not identified as a special needs learner, she had trouble staying focused and retaining information from moment to moment within one lesson. Peter, however, does not normally have these difficulties. I wondered what was going on with him. Indeed many of the students who were having difficulties this week in identifying notes were not unable to do so. They in truth seemed unfocused or off task, leading me to believe there may have been events that unfolded outside of my classroom, which I was unaware of.

With the groups refocused, I began to explain the next activity in which the students would be using the rhythmic flash cards that are used to create small compositions. "You are going to do this in groups of four. Your group and another group, will each have two flashcards, and you will have to work together to make your own rhythm to perform," I explained handing each student two flashcards from a shuffled deck. As the students got up to move around the room, there was much excitement and dialogue between the students and their partners as to whom they should work with.

Within two minutes, the students had settled into their groups and started to work. “Mr. Becker, they aren’t letting me help,” Evelyn said from the corner of the room.

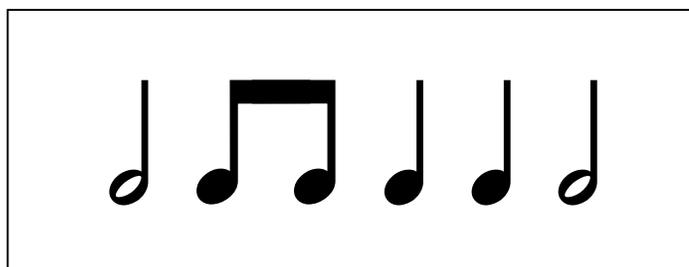
“But she is a girl,” Gared protested.

Evelyn was in a group of all boys except for her, and Gared had a hard time understanding the unevenness of the ratio of their group, leading to an argument between him and Evelyn. Walking from group to group after settling disputes of interaction, I could see students teaching each other through the composition.

“Mr. Becker, could you use the blank side of the flashcards to show that a half note is worth two beats?” Liza asked me. She recognized that in the blue pocket chart I use the backside of the flashcards for students to identify that a half note is worth two beats.

“Liza, your group can do that if you want, but you do what you think is best,” I explained, knowing that the group would figure out a solution for themselves.

Walking up to another group, I heard Nate explain, “We need to count it like this: One hold two, three and four, five, six, seven hold eight. See, that’s an eighth note.” Listening, I heard them dispute the melodic flow of their rhythmic composition (See figure 4).



*Figure 4:* Nate’s flashcard composition

As the students worked together, the interactions became more creative. Nearing the end of their time, the students clearly wanted to share their compositions with each other. Originally, I was hoping for the students only to share their compositions with their group and with me, but I was happy and excited to see that many of the groups wanted to share what they had created with the entire class. Ending the activity, the students proudly performed their compositions for each other. It was evident that the students took pride in what they had created and were eager to share what they had done.

### **Rhythm and Meter**

Breaking from their groups, I began the introduction of meter to the students. “This should be an easy concept for the students to get,” I thought to myself. “They already know how to count the notations in four/four meter. Now it’s just a matter of introducing the time signature.” Of course, it didn’t take me long to realize that I had assumed too much of my students this early in the year. The students reconvened on a large area rug placed in front of the whiteboard with their note buddies. There are no chairs in my room, so I have found area rugs define learning spaces quite well. Writing a rhythm on the board, I asked, “What are the lines that I have placed in the middle and at the end?” Last year, the students learned that these lines were, in fact, bar lines and that you had to restart counting at one after you see a bar line. A hand went up, and Fred answered confidently, “That’s a bar note.”

Evelyn said, “NO, its not Fred. That’s called a bar LINE, not a bar NOTE.” Evelyn is usually very quiet and waits her turn, but she among many of her classmates, enjoyed the opportunity to correct Fred, since he does it to his classmates so often.

Knowing that correcting his behavior may only exacerbate the issue, I moved on. “Right, and what do we have to do once we see a bar line?” I asked the class.

Kevin responded, “We have to start counting back at one.” I was pleased that Kevin knew what to do and that he was more focused today.

“Does anyone think they know what this might tell us?” I asked pointing at the time signature I drew in the front of the rhythm. The room was silent, and I could see the students’ minds wondering, trying to see if they could create a response. It was at this point that I could tell that more time would be needed to review what a time signature was.

After a week of introductions, the students seemed still to have great difficulty understanding the concept of time signature. At the beginning of class, the students reviewed the whole note. Although I had taught the students how to recognize and count this note, they still had difficulty recalling information on it. “What note is this?” I asked. Students in the class yelled out several answers from an empty note to a blank note, and, my personal favorite, a cookie.

“This is called a whole note. How do you think we count it since it has three blank cards next to it?” I asked.

Nate raised his hand and responded, “One hold two hold three hold four.”

“Awesome, how did you know that was what you were supposed to do?” I asked.

“Well...we count the half notes one hold two so it makes sense that we count that the same way, but longer,” Nate responded.

“Alright. Well, what are the notes in our other measures?” I said pointing to each one. Walking to the whiteboard, I drew a four, four time signature on the board. “Who remembers what this is?” I asked.

Raising his hand, Steve answered “A time signature.” Steve still seemed to be having difficulty identifying the names of the notations learned, but he could easily identify their rhythmic value.

“When we use it, how many beats can we put in one measure?” I asked.

“Four” answered Kevin.

Drawing a whole note on the board, I said “Lets make a family tree for the notes. If a quarter note is worth one beat, how many beats are in the whole note?”

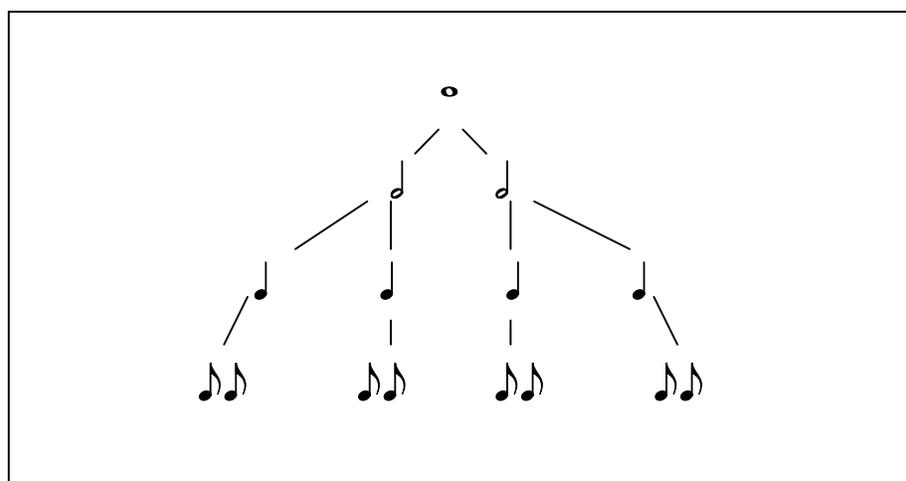
Abbey raised her hand “Its worth four, I think.”

“That’s right, if that’s worth four, what is the half note worth? I asked the class. We continued the dialogue through whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes. During the discussion the students had little difficulty matching a half note to two beats, whole note to four, and a quarter note to one.

“Well what two notes put together will be worth one beat?” I asked. Kevin proudly stated, “ A quarter note.”

Are you sure about that?” I asked Kevin. “Isn’t this a quarter note?”

“NO! A quarter note.” Kevin said, as he stood up and pointed to a flashcard of an eight note. Kevin was correct that the next notation in the note value tree we were creating, (See Figure 5) but he was unable to recognize that the notation should have been named eighth notes.

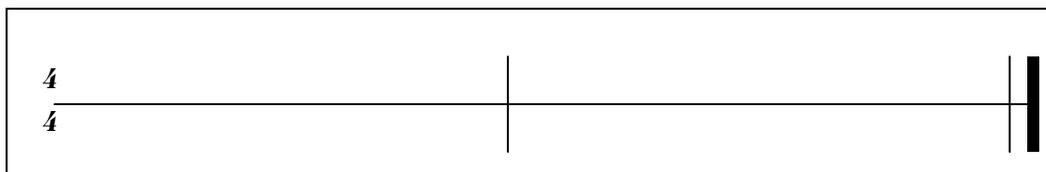


*Figure 5: rhythm tree*

Drawing the notes and their values on a small green chalkboard hanging next to the whiteboard, I said, “This is going to be our little cheat sheet for the day.”

Drawing a percussion staff with a four, four time signature on the board with the numbers of the beats 1,2,3,4 underneath each measure, I stated, “OK, we know the notes. Now let’s make a composition.” Calling on the students, I asked them to each choose a note which might fit into the measure. Many of the students, including Steve, Peter, and Abbey, answered correctly identifying not only a note with a fitting value, but identifying the number of beats left in each measure.

Handing out percussion staff paper (See Figure 6), I stated, “I want you to find a buddy to work with while you both compose your own melodies. If you get stuck ask your buddy for help.” The students shuffled around and situated themselves quietly around the room and began to work. Observing the students I could hear the discussions going on. “Wait, why can’t I use the half note?” asked Gared.



*Figure 6:* percussion staff

“Because you don’t have enough beats in the measure. See you only have one beat left and a half note is worth two,” replied Bryn, his partner. During this time, I observed from the sidelines and the students worked in their groups until the end of class.

The following week, I begin by writing a sentence on the board completely incorrectly. With letters written upside down and backwards, as well as placing the words in the wrong order, I asked “What is wrong with this sentence?”

The class yelled out, “What is that!”

A few students such as Nate said, “Mr. Becker, you wrote that entire sentence wrong. The letters aren’t even written correctly.”

“Ah!, Ok, so I’ll fix them. There I’m done!” I shouted not doing anything to the sentence.

“No, you’re not!” Mabel said. “You don’t have the words in the right order. Look the noun is in the wrong place and everything,” she added. “This is how I get some compositions back, even when the students have told me they had them proof read.” I explained. “What I would like to see is all of you get with your buddies and help them proof read or finish their compositions,” I added. It was my hope that through asking the students to read each other’s papers, that they would pick up on the mistakes that were being over looked. I handed out the papers and the students got the materials they needed

and found their buddies, many of them choosing the same buddy as they had from last week.

During this time, Kevin broke into tears, and I had to talk to him privately. Kevin's family was planning a move to Ohio after winter break, and this had upset the balance in his world. The students who sat beside him were very helpful after I calmed him down. They set their own work aside and focused their attention on Kevin, making sure that he understood what was going on. These students set a perfect example of what classmate friendship is about, setting the tone for the rest of the music class.

Demonstrating group work and camaraderie.

“We are going to finish our rhythm compositions today. What I want you to do is work with your buddy and after you have finished composing, swap papers and check each other's work.

“So we are peer editing?” Bryn asked.

“Exactly and we want to make sure we did it right because I won't take it if I know you haven't proofread it,” I elaborated. I passed out the papers and the students dispersed into groups. As I watched, the students were interacting and checking each other's work. I was eager to see what kind of material they would provide for me. Once in their small groups, the students were given the time needed to work together.

“Mr. Becker, can I borrow some of the flashcards from the chart so I can make sure I'm writing them correctly?” Peter asked.

“Go ahead” I replied.

Watching and listening, I saw Gared working alone, which concerned me because he is a student who needs a lot of help and guidance. Walking over to a group of

students I asked them if Gared could work with them. One of the students in the group was Nate, who was very happy to help Gared proofread his paper.

“I’m done,” Robbie said as he thrust his paper in my face.

“Let’s see.” Looking the paper over, I could see some simple mistakes. A few quarter notes were not filled in and some of the stems were backwards. “You didn’t have your buddy proofread this yet. I can tell.”

“Yeah, he did.” Robbie claimed.

“Well, have him check it again because I see some rushed mistakes. Stuff that you do when you are in a hurry.”

Several other students began forming a line with their partners in front of me.

“We are done!” most of them would exclaim as they stood in front of me. I could see that several of them either did what I asked of them and did it correctly on the first try, but others were not proof reading their papers. Ashley was coming up to me asking me about note values. I noticed that several students in the class were still having difficulties connecting the note values to the symbol, and several students who had turned their papers in asked for them back.

While grading the students’ work, using the rubric (See Appendix E) I had explained to the students, I had found that many of the students comprehended the concept of the measure correctly. This being said, I found that many students were still having trouble correlating the symbols and their note values to the correct names assigned to them. Several students confused quarter rests with half rests and also confused their corresponding notes. I could see that many of the students would need more opportunities to read and write notation prior to performing each other’s

compositions. As I reviewed the assignments, I noticed that most experienced difficulty with the concept of coding musical notation into something creative. Many of them used combinations of rests within one measure leading to two or three measures of their compositions having total silence. This was in steep contrast to my special needs identified students such as Kevin and Peter (See Figure 7) who used a great deal of creativity and contrast to create their compositions. Demonstrating the ability to use a variation of faster and slower notations in combination, as well as developing a definitive beginning and ending to their rhythmic melodies. Another special needs student, Gared, still seems to have great difficulty in comprehending reading and writing. While he completed the assignment and did well, I believe that this was done primarily through his work buddies' assistance. It was also through the course of this process, that many of the other students would simply walk up to me and ask what the values of the notes were and what they were called instead of trying to apply their own knowledge. Hence, I refused to provide them with the information they wanted. Instead, I prompted them through questioning to figure it out on their own.

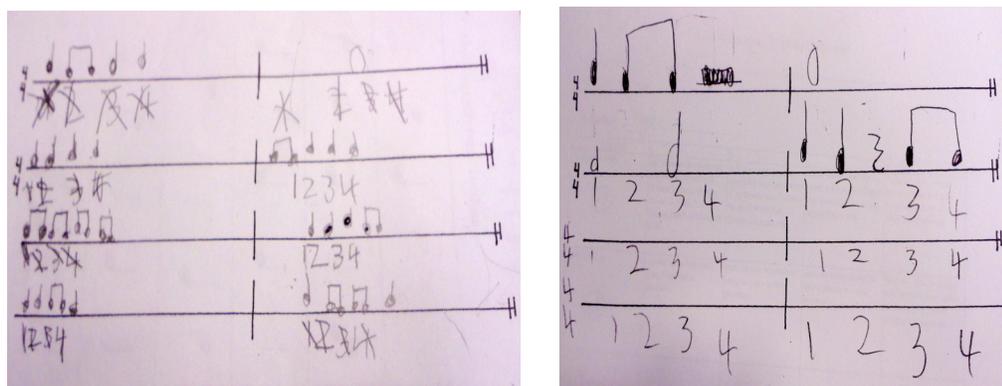


Figure 7: Kevin and Peter's work

### **Are We In Treble?**

The students converged on their assigned seats as they completed their compositions. “We are going to learn how to draw a treble clef today. Everyone go get a marker and a dry erase board.” The students rushed over and in a mad dash got dry erase boards, markers, and erasers and were back in their seats. “O.K. Here is how we draw the treble clef. We make capital J give it a head, then backside, and then a big belly.” Using this image, the students always seem to remember the way to draw the treble clef. For the remainder of class, the students practiced drawing treble clefs.

“Yuck that’s horrible, I need to redo that and try drawing them smaller,” Bryn said as she erased her first attempts at treble clefs and rewrote them. The scribble lines of what looked like a cross between a cursive uppercase G and a swirling doodle, slowly became a simple treble clef with the curves in the right areas and the distinct line through the middle dividing it in half. While some were written backwards, the students were showing me each time they drew a treble clef that they were developing stronger skills in writing the most important symbol they would need to know to compose on the staff.

### **The Next Class**

I had just finished grading the students’ rhythmic compositions using the rubric I had created for them (See Appendix E) and was very impressed with what they all had done. With a few minor mistakes made, I decided that I would allow them all time to correct what they had done wrong. I was excited to see if I would hand back papers marked with a 3, which is a moderate grade, and have them turn the composition in ready to be considered a 4, the equivalent of an A plus. Because of their success at comprehending rhythmic notation, I could see that the students were ready to move on to

identifying the symbols and notation needed to compose and perform music placed on a treble staff.

“Because we’ve done so well, we are not going to be doing a rhythm read this week.” I explained to the students as I handed back their graded compositions. The students were talking to each other had they received their graded compositions back from me. They were impressed that they had been as successful as they were on this first attempt showing off their work to their neighbors as I continued to pass out papers. I was happy with this response from the students. I predicted this response while I was grading the compositions. Looking with a set of analytical eyes at each paper I could see that many of them had only minor issues with identifying rhythms correctly. Forgetting to fill in quarter notes and adding one too many beats to a measure of the composition. For the next portion of the class, the students were provided time to correct those small mistakes they might have overlooked in their compositions prior to turning it back into me. “I’m going to give you the chance to get a perfect score on your compositions since everyone already did so well,” I told the group. I had hoped that since they had done so well on the compositions they would do just as well on their final editing. Looking at the papers as they returned them to me, I could see that they were ready to move on to the new forms of writing music.

Once all the papers had been turned in, the students took out lap held whiteboards, markers, and erasers. “We are going to review this symbol. Who can remember what it is?” I asked.

Kevin, who had been in trouble earlier that morning for throwing a chair in his classroom was newly energized by his successful composition and happily responded to my question with, “A TREBLE CLEF!!!”

“That’s right, Kevin. We are going to be practicing how to draw it again so we can play a game. Let’s start.” After briefly reviewing how to draw the treble clef, I asked the students to fill up their whiteboards with as many treble clefs as they could. As they finished they showed me their work, so that I could see how they were progressing. After they finished, I announced, “We are going to be divided into two teams and each person on your team is going to have to run up to the board and write a treble clef. The group who is done first wins,” I explained. The students ran to the board one at a time determined to demonstrate that they were able to draw a clean clearly written treble clef. You could see that they were enjoying themselves, as they would return to their team with a smile of satisfaction on their face. They knew that they were drawing the treble clef correctly and they were being allowed to show off this newfound skill to the entire class.

After the game, I explained, “If we place the treble clef down next to this thing right here, we are making something new to read music off of. This is called a staff.” I went on explaining how the staff had five lines and four spaces and it tells us what keys to push on the piano or where to put our fingers on the violin.

“It tells us what notes to play,” Lynn said.

“Yes, exactly,” I replied. “Because the Treble Clef is here, I know that these four spaces have a special order that starts at the bottom of the staff and goes up.” I explained. I proceeded to show them by hopping to each space on the carpet calling out their names

“*F A C E*”. I could see the students were puzzled by this order so I had them copy me by using their hand as a staff. Once the students had a tactile example at their disposal, they were able to understand that the order of spaces spelled a word and that this would be a constant when dealing with the treble staff. Jumping from space to space, I asked the students to name the notes of the spaces, which they did in unison. While it seemed the students were comprehending the order of the spaces, I wondered, how well this knowledge would transfer to their compositions the following week. This was mainly because the students had delayed responses when asked to identify the spaces correctly. Many of the students were reversing the order from top to bottom instead of bottom to top. I could also see that some students also had difficulty spatially differentiating between the lines and spaces of the staff.

### **In Your Face**

When students arrived the following week, I had hoped that they would be able to recall the information about the staff from the prior week. I asked “What is this with five lines and four spaces?” I could see that the students were having difficulty recalling the term staff; however they were able to identify that there were five lines and the spaces in between the lines spell the word FACE. This was a very important step since I was concerned with their ability to recall that information. I knew that they would be able to identify the staff if I helped them out. Holding up a foam treble clef, I asked “What is this?”.

“A treble clef,” The class responded in unison.

“And if I would put this treble clef on the five lines and four spaces we would call it something. What would we call it?” I asked. Eventually, the students recalled the

treble staff, and as we reviewed the spaces of the staff, the students identified them verbally. Through the processes, the students were beginning to gain fluency in identifying the order of the spaces of the treble staff.

Once the students had situated themselves back into their assigned seats, I explained how they were going to compose a new melody using the rhythmic notation we had learned but now place it on the spaces of the staff. To guide the students through this concept, I demonstrated how to compose a melody on the whiteboard in front of the classroom. Throughout the process, I asked each student to identify various notes, and place them on the spaces of the staff. To ensure that the students understood the concept, I repeated the activity once more to ensure all students participated and could demonstrate that they were able to combine their past knowledge of rhythmic notation and apply it now in the new setting of composition on the treble staff. Once each of these compositions had been completed, I would perform the composition on the piano so that the students would then be able to hear what they had just created.

Handing out staff paper, I explained to the students how they were to now demonstrate their ability to compose a melody using only the spaces of the staff. “You can use all the rhythms we have learned so far. Just make sure that you use the right number of beats,” I said. The students rushed to the counter in the classroom and took clipboards and pencils to begin their compositions. The room became quiet as they all started composing. Walking to each student, I observed to see if they were having any difficulties. Overall, the students within this class understood the concepts behind the assigned composition using the treble staff. The students seemed to be able to place the correct number of beats in each measure and were demonstrating that they were able to

place the note correctly in between the lines of the staff. It would not be until I collected them that I would know if they were just placing the notes randomly or if they had truly created a melodic line. Some students such as Jessica asked me to place a list of notes they were allowed to use on the board. They did not wish to know their values, but they needed to see the guidelines. It seemed to me that the students were able to identify the notes but were not yet comfortable enough to draw them without a model. I had thought that they were ready for this leap towards independence; however by Jessica and the other students asking me this, I knew that the class was still in need of guidance while composing their compositions. Once I had done this, the students were silent composing for the remainder of the class.

#### **Shadow Log of Three Students**

During the student's independent composition time, I observed that many of the students who have an I.E.P. (Individual Education Plan) have had difficulty creating a melody. While they had not experienced any greater difficulty than other students within their classes, I wanted to ensure that these students were developing and growing in their knowledge. While the students were working on completing their compositions this week, I wanted to see how three of my students with disabilities were able to participate, demonstrate comprehension, and applying their knowledge of musical notation. Could they create a melody of any kind? What concept were they able to apply without my help or the help of the student? If these students were lost, what would I have to do to help guide them in the right direction?

**Gared**

Throughout the process of the rhythm read and identification of notes, Gared was attentive. He demonstrated a strong ability to decode the music placed in front of him. This ability went further when the students were asked to compose and perform a rhythmic composition as a group. While Gared was quiet during the composition portion, he was eager to demonstrate this ability to perform the rhythm on sight. I observed Gared during the review of the staff, and he didn't seem particularly interested, playing with his shoes and hands. I was not sure if this was because he was bored or because he had resigned himself to the fact that he did not understand.

I modeled how to compose using measures and time signatures, four beats in a measure and that a quarter note is worth one beat, we talked through the spaces of the treble staff. Through the review, the students were placed various rhythms on the lines of the staff, showing that they could identify their values and place them into a measure to equal four beats. Quickly a melodic line developed on the empty staff. During this time, Gared was unresponsive and, attempted played chicken in the back of the room with Peter. Despite this behavior, once the students were asked to compose independently, Gared sat quietly working diligently on his composition. I observed when I checked up on him that his paper had too many notes and beats in each measure, and they were on the space F. This confused me since Gared is able to decode music placed in front of him. Guiding him through the activity, I helped Gared by asking him to identify the number of beats in each measure. Then I prompted him through the process composing and reading music to help him further understand how many beats should be placed in

each measure. Despite my guidance, I could see that Gared was struggling to understand and comprehend the coding of musical notes into music.

**Peter**

Throughout the beginning of the lesson, Peter seemed off task, not truly focused on the activities that he was supposed to participate in. Instead, I caught he and Gared attempting to play a game of chicken in the back of the room. Once Peter was focused, he performed the daily sight read alongside his classmates. Observing him, he performed the notes correctly and accurately. This surprised me since he did not seem to be focused until the students were all ready to perform the sight-read.

As the class resituated itself to review the staff and the treble clef, Peter hid himself at the far end of the risers, where the class was sitting. As we reviewed the treble staff and its spaces, Peter was on the same learning plane as a majority of the other students. Throughout the process, Peter volunteered to identify the spaces of the staff by their letter name, and, in fact, did so better than many of his classmate who did not have an I.E.P identifying difficulties in reading and writing.

Once we had completed the review of the spaces, the class resituated in their assigned seats. It was time to watch me model how to compose a melody using the spaces of the staff. As I observed Peter, I could see he was distracted and not paying attention. He was playing a hand game with Gared instead of listening to the directions I was giving. I wondered how well he would be able to work independently since he did not seem to be focused during this modeling time.

Dispersed throughout the room after the being given blank staff paper, Peter and his classmates began to compose independently. As he worked, Peter demonstrated all

the directions I had modeled on the board for the entire group, suggesting to me that he had indeed been processing my explanation.

“Mr. Becker, can I do eighth notes on two different spaces?” he asked, showing me his work. I could see that he was writing in a neat manner with a majority of his notes on the F and A spaces of the staff.

“Sure, but why don’t you use more of the spaces?” I asked.

“Well, I wasn’t sure I should, because it might be too hard (for students to play on an instrument),” he responded.

“Alright, but try using three maybe then. Ok?” I asked.

“OK.” And off Peter ran to finish his work. For the remainder of the class, Peter sat quietly near the piano working hard. “I can’t wait to have it proofread next week,” he said as he went to line up.

### **Kevin**

Kevin had arrived late to class due to his routine being totally upset for the entire year because of his family moving. I understood that mornings were difficult for him because he treated each day at school like the last day he would see any of us ever again. Walking into the room, Kevin was calm; asking classmates what he had missed while he was out of the room. Sitting in his spot, Kevin fixed his attention to the rhythm read, a rhythmic sight reading activity we start each class with, for that day. As I asked him questions on rhythmic notation, Kevin took a long time to answer; however once he did, he demonstrated that we could identify the names and durations of the rhythms, as well as apply them to new settings.

“Kevin why don’t you start us off,” I asked as we returned to whole class instruction. ‘What kind of rhythm should we put on our staff first?’

He paused for a moment, and responded “An eighth note.”

“Ok, see how Kevin picked an eighth note, everyone? We can do something special with an eighth note that we can’t do with other notes. Kevin pick two spaces to put your eighth note on.”

He pondered and then said, “The C and the E.” Drawing one-eighth note on the C and another on the E, I saw Kevin smile with excitement when he realized that he was doing well with what was asked of him. For the rest of the class, the students were tasked with composing independently. I asked Kevin if he wanted to work alone or with a partner.

“No, I want to try it on my own,”

“Are you sure, because you don’t have to,” I explained to him in private before we started.

“No, I’ll try,” he responded. For the remainder of the class he worked independently, taking a large amount of time to complete two measures.

When asked why he was working in this manner, he stated, “I’m thinking about what notes I want to use. I want to use them all, but I know I can’t.” I was impressed with his response. I observed that he was taking his time to be creative slowly making decision about what notes would best fit where. This was a great contrast to the beginning of the class where he was unable to understand the project.

### **The Consensus**

I could see the differences in learning from Gared and Peter when compared to Kevin. It seemed that Gared and Peter had great difficulty creating melodies due to their reading and writing disabilities. Their struggle with wanting to learn the information had manifested itself through negative behavior and lack of attention during the lesson. I could see that once they understood the concept, they were eager to use their knowledge; however because of their reading disabilities they were still having issues coding the music in the proper manner. This led to them mistaking rhythmic values and having difficulty legibly writing their melodies.

This was in contrast to Kevin who was able to create interesting melodies. Through his independent work, Kevin was able to demonstrate he was indeed beginning to read and write music. Although it took more time due to his wanting to create the perfect composition, Kevin's compositions were a demonstration of his ability to code musical notation through the lines and spaces of the staff and through rhythmic notations.

### **The Bad Idea**

The following cycle, I felt confident that the students would be able to transfer what they had learned to instruments, so I planned performance and practice time into the activities for the day. Unfortunately, the students had other plans for the composition activity.

To begin the class, the students came in and prepared to perform their regular rhythm read. Instead, I handed back their papers for them to complete. "Today, instead of working alone, I would like you to find a buddy and work to make sure that your compositions meet our requirements." I told them (See Appendix F). Handing back the

papers, I noticed that over half of the class had not written their names on their papers. I was not sure if this was a sign of what was to come, or if they were just in a hurry at the end of the last class. As the students began to complete the task, I announced, "If you are finished, I would like you to play each others' compositions on one of the classroom instruments. This way you know what they will sound like." The students rushed to get instruments. Giddy with delight, they began to play *with* rather than *on* the instruments. This was a concern for me because I wondered how well the students were actually playing each other's melodies, if they were at all, or how well the compositions would be written since they were not focused on playing the written melodies, but rather improvising new ones. Watching the students, I realized that a better demonstration on how to use the instruments and some practice with performing music properly on them would be needed prior to them attempting to perform compositions on their own again. As the students finished, I collected their papers, and they went back to their seats and prepared for the next activity. I took notice as I collected the compositions, that the students were making many mistakes they had not made in their rhythmic notations, the placement of too many beats within a measure, the confusion of the rhythmic value of notes, poor hand writing, and the confusion of the sequence of musical pitches on the staff (See Figure 8). Was it because I removed too much scaffolding too quickly? I reflected on this and decided that in the next class, I would not allow them to use instruments while proofreading, which might have caused a majority of the problems. This may be due to the students' past experience on the classroom instruments, xylophones and metalophones, either being mimicked rhythms or simple ostinato

patterns, as well as improvisation of melodies on pentatonic scales. This was in reality the first time that the students had used these instruments in such a structured setting.

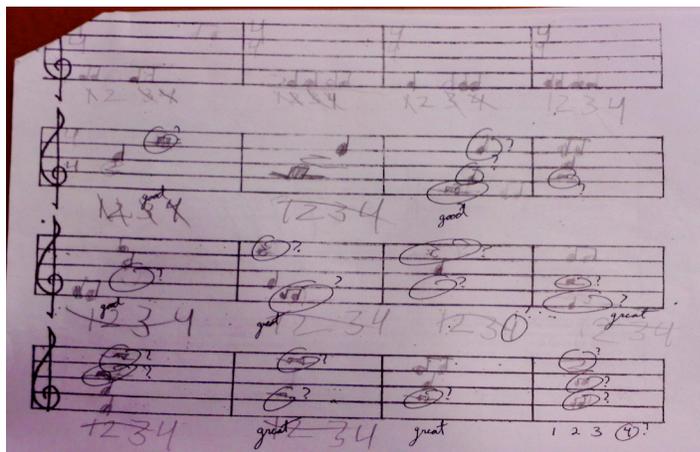


Figure 8: student composition using FACE

For the remainder of the class, I introduced the sentence to review the lines of the staff. Demonstrating from the bottom up, I explained how the sentence Empty Garbage Before Dad Flips, would help the students remember the lines (See Figure 9). Once I reviewed this I asked the students to identify the word that would help us remember the spaces of the staff.



Figure 9: lines of the treble staff

Several students yelled out “FACE!”

I then sat in my teacher chair and explained, “Reading and writing music is like learning a new language. If I wrote something on the board in English would you be able to understand it?” I asked, and the students nodded their heads. “Ok, well what if I wrote this?” Walking to the board, I wrote the sentence “Ich bin ein Lehrer.”

“We don’t know what that means,” said Ryan from the front of the room.

“Ah, but what if you knew German and you write in English underneath then?” I asked.

“Well that would be really cool,” Robbie responded.

I went on to explain how when you read music you are translating another language into sounds. “You can even spell words with the lines and spaces of the staff.” To demonstrate, I took my small magnetic whiteboard and placed magnets on various spaces and lines, spelling the words one note at a time (See Figure 10). As the students appeared to gain fluency, I allowed them to solve entire words on their own.



*Figure 10:* whiteboard with staff

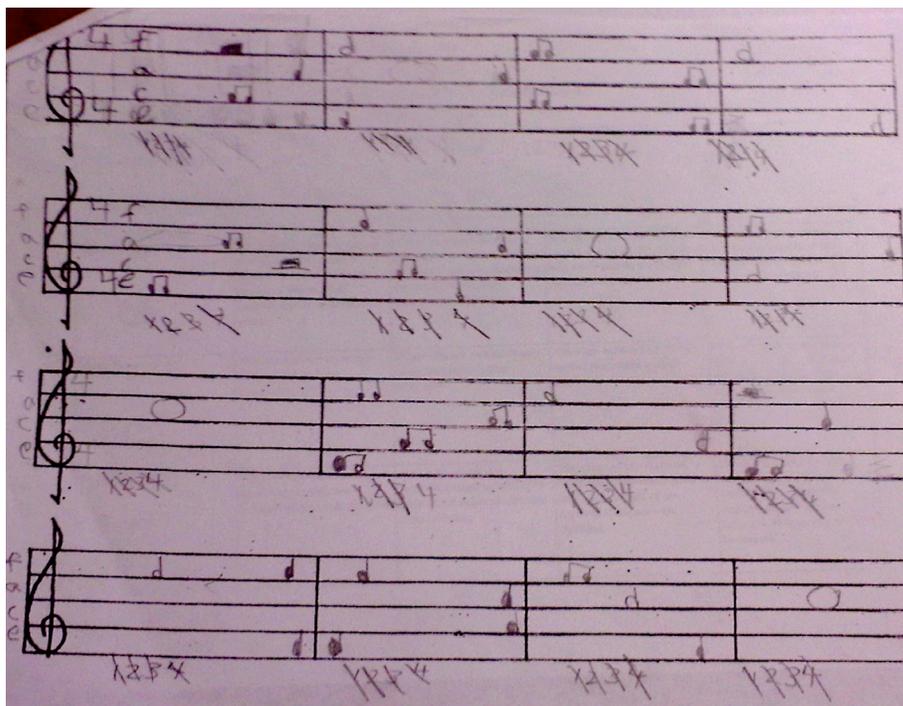
I was nervous at this point because I didn't know how well this coding and decoding would move from the board and paper to instruments. I decided to alter the plan for the following week by incorporating spelling of codes into the lesson so that students would be given the opportunity to apply their new knowledge.

### **My BIG Realization**

To grade the students' work, I created a rubric, which would be scored on an R to 3 scale. If a student met all the requirements, he or she would receive a 3 for the category. If a student did not meet the requirements for 3 or 2, he or she would receive an R for redo. Students receiving an R on any of the categories would be required to correct their mistakes. While many of the students did not receive an R, the ones that did would be provided time with me to receive independent instruction. This added scaffolding, which could be anything from prompted questions to more drastic exercises which would aid them in growing in areas of musical literacy where they were struggling.

Overall, student compositions were written in a manner in which all notes were legible. I was able to play through the majority of the melodies without difficulty of identifying the spaces on which the notes were placed. However, I could see that several of the students wrote small, placing the head of the note as well as the stem to fit on the space of the staff. While the notation was organized, the notation was not written in the way expected (See Figure 11). In contrast, other students wrote notes within their musical notation so large; that I was unable to decode on what space the pitches should be played (See Figure 12). I observed that this was mostly likely the result of the students not feeling totally comfortable with the proper handwriting connected to musical composition. Much like kindergarteners learning to write their alphabet letters, these

students will need time to practice and apply their new knowledge until they are able to polish the skill of writing notation.



*Figure 11: example of small print*

I observed Gared had several difficulties with this project. For example, he struggled to place beats correctly within each measure. This was combined with his inability to use more than one space throughout the composition. To alter this, I asked another student to help him. While this encouraged some correction, it did not help Gared enough (Figure 13).

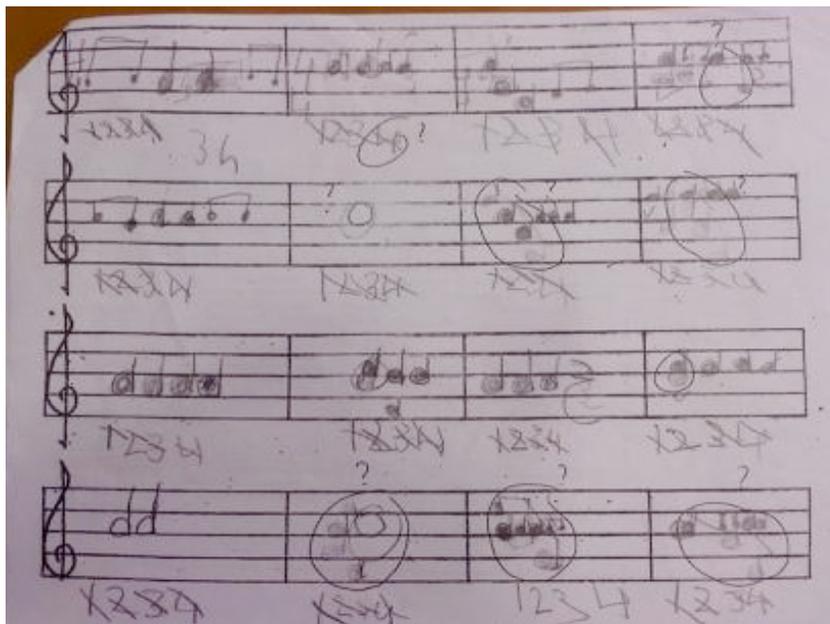


Figure 12: large print

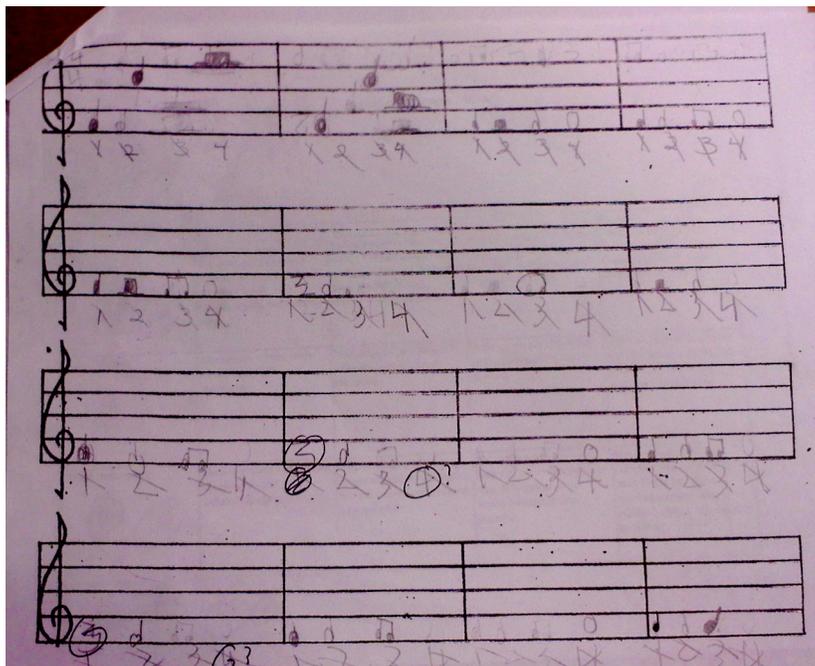
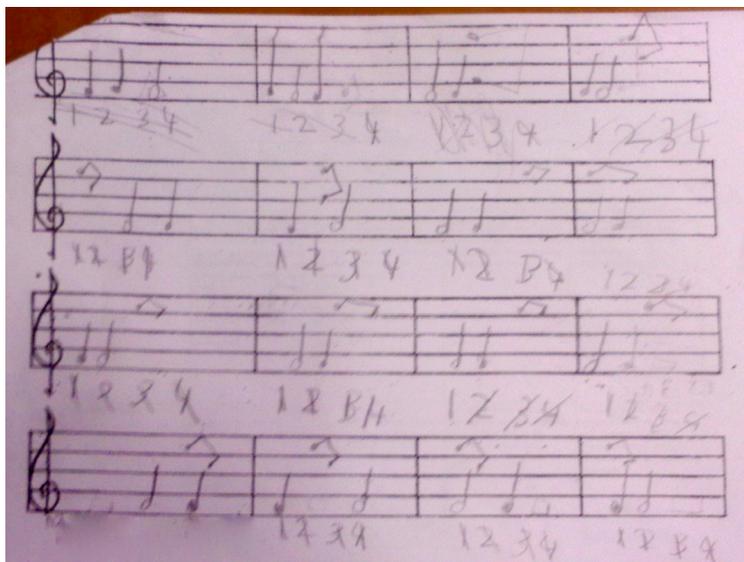


Figure 13: Gared's composition

Peter was doing fairly well throughout the composition, but he and several other students colored in all notes, including whole notes (Figure 14). This led me to believe that these students including Peter, were having difficulty understanding the notations with longer rhythmic durations were meant to be hollow. While they were differentiating this on their prior rhythmic composition, the addition of the staff confused or overwhelmed them, causing them to make these mistakes. As a result, I decided that the following week would be dedicated to a stronger scaffolding to support the students understanding and growth in the application and use of the treble staff in reading and writing music.



*Figure 14:* Peter's composition

At least half of the class needed to redo the assignment, suggesting to me that the scaffolding was not in place for the students to play their compositions on an instrument as they composed. In allowing the students to compose in this manner distracted them

from paying closer attention to the knowledge they were to be applying to create melodies. This caused them to make mistakes, which may not have been done otherwise.

In reflection, all of the students were only doing what come naturally in the scaffolding processes. Improvising and developing and understanding of an instrument is an important part of the music literacy processes. However, while I understood this, I failed to implement this practice prior to the start of this activity. Instead my thought processes turn to that of what a mature composer would do while sitting by their instrument composing as they played, I could see that this form of multi-tasking was not developed in these students yet. They would need more time developing the skills of reading and writing prior to adding the performance aspect to their work. While this would provide for a disjointed melodic contour, it would provide the students with a stronger conceptual basis for performing music on instruments in the future. While this is not where I had hoped to be at this point in the students learning, I had to recreate my teaching and scaffolding so that the students would be able to grow and learn in a manner which best fit where they were in their learning process.

### **The Better Decision**

Because of the challenges I experienced in this class, I decided that I had to adapt the lesson to help students in other classes learn about notation more successfully.

“Today, I’m going to let you finish working on your compositions,” I announced, and a cheer went up in within the group.

Raising her hand, Kate asked, “Can we work with a buddy this week?”

“Yes, you can, and I am giving you most of the class to work together. What I want you to do is take your time and make sure everything follows our guidelines we

made up last week,” I added. Passing out papers, I review with the students the guidelines and expectations for their compositions. The rhythms written on the board were to be used as a guide for handwriting, and the students were to only use the spaces of the staff. Through the review the students reminded each other that they were to place no more than four beats in a measure and that they would have to be able to read each other’s work and help each other make corrections. The students then dispersed into their groups to work. Walking from group to group, I noticed many of the students correcting simple mistakes that they had made in their past compositions. Correcting each other’s rhythmic values, making sure that there were only four beats in a measure and ensuring that the notes were legible kept students engaged within their groups.

“You need to make sure that this whole note isn’t on a line and a space,” I heard Kevin say to his partner. I could see he had completed his melody and was excited that he would get to share it in class the following week. He asked if he could play it on the piano since he had starting taking piano lessons, and I agreed. As Kevin played, I observed many students working diligently with each other, clapping out their rhythms so that they could identify the beats in a measure.

“Wait, there are too many beats right here. See you have a whole note next to this quarter note and eighth note, and you can’t do that,” I heard Ann say to Kate.

“Oh yeah, I forgot. That should have been a half note,” Kate said.

“Maybe you should put it on a different line. It kinda looks like it will be boring when we listen to it,” Ann suggested.

“Yeah, you’re right there. I’ll put it on E. That will be way different,” Samantha said.

While I was hoping to introduce the language of music concept to this class, they were so engrossed within their compositions; I wanted to allow them to complete their work. Observing them as they were handing them in, I could see that listening to their performances would be great fun.

### **How Did They Do?**

As I reviewed student performance, I noticed that many confused half and quarter notes in value, as well as the rest counterparts. In addition to this, I saw that some of the students were confused about the placement of the notes in-between the lines. I am unsure if this is because of their lack of development of this skill or if they were distracted by their group interaction to correctly apply their knowledge.

I also noticed that some students had behavioral issues when working with friends. To correct this issues for these students, I decided that during the next composition project, I would provide assigned groupings. It was my hope that in creating a heterogeneous style of grouping, the students would be able to assist each other in composing meaningful and creative melodies, thus ensuring the concept of Vygotsky's more knowledgeable other. This would take their learning from simple application to evaluative, and synthesis levels in Bloom's Taxonomy. It was also though these heterogeneous grouping I could ensure that students would be working and stay focused on the task that they have set for themselves.

Through out the activity I could see that many of the students who were making mistakes were doing so, not due to a lack of knowledge of the information, rather, a lack of focus due to interactions within the groups. I believe that this interaction and behavior was due mostly to the students not feeling comfortable with connecting their skills of

rhythmic notation to that of the treble staff. Since the students were having difficulty with this, and my grading seemed very harsh, I decided to mark some corrections in pencil and allow the students to correct on their own. In this way, all students were given the opportunity to correct anything within their compositions they were displeased with. I would also help the students by providing group activities on the whiteboard demonstrating the mistakes a majority of the students had done. If I showed the students how to fix what was done wrong, it would provide them with an improved connection between their knowledge of rhythms and notation with staff and the order of pitches. I hoped that this in turn, would provide the students with an opportunity to learn from the errors they had created and develop the skills required to succeed in music literacy through learning from these mistakes.

Despite some of the trouble they encountered, many of the students were extremely successful in composing melodies using the spaces of the staff (See Figure 15).

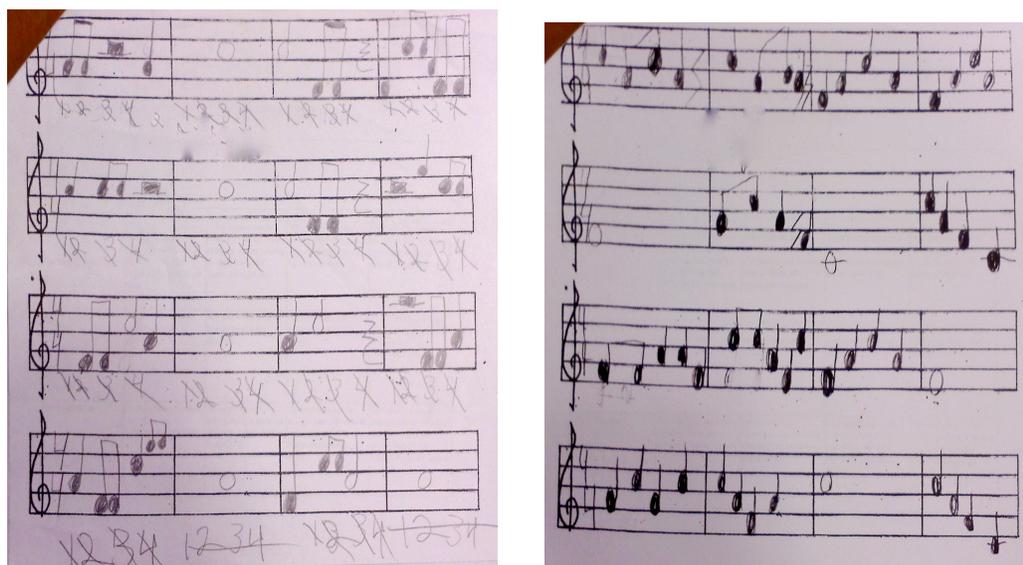


Figure 15: student work of Gared and Kevin

Because of this application, the majority of the students were able to identify the spaces of the staff without prompting of visual aides. The compositions also encouraged the students' growth into performance of written music on instruments. This was because of the students' ability to remove specific bars from the xylophones so they would be able to visually coordinate the notation to the correct pitches on the instruments as well as aurally be able to identify the melody.

### **The Corrective Lesson**

When students arrived for their next class, I had examples of their work pre-written on the whiteboard. I hoped to create a dialogue, which would encourage the students to apply their knowledge of musical notation to evaluate and critique each other's compositions. During this class, I was observed by my principal, which excited the students. They wanted to demonstrate what they had been learning in music for her and show how nice their melodies sounded. To begin the class, the students came in and followed their normal classroom routines. We began with our sight-reading activity, in which I introduced them to the whole rest for the first time this year. While I had shared this with them last year, many did not remember it. Anticipating this, I had put off introducing it until they were comfortable with the half rest since the rests look so similar. After the students identified and performed the rhythmic notation, one shared the thoughts of his classmates by stating, "That was a piece of cake, Mr. Becker."

Moving on, I had the student's look at the two measures I had written on the board (See Figure 16). "Now I want to tell you that most of you did well on your compositions. I see that some of you did excellent, writing clearly and showing me how

you can use all the different rhythms we were allowed to use. However, many of you made mistakes like this. What is wrong with this composition?" I asked. Raising his hand Andre said, "There are too many beats in the first measure." The composition had two-quarter notes, a half rest, and a set of eighth notes in it.



*Figure 16:* example composition

"Well what do you mean?" I asked.

"Um, the half rest— it shouldn't be a half rest; it should be a quarter rest," Andre stated quite sure of himself.

"That's right! I saw many of you confusing the half rest for the quarter rest. So what should I do to fix this?" I asked. I knew that many of the students in their excitement and hurry had reversed the rhythmic values of these two symbols.

"You should change the half rest to a quarter rest," explained Chrissy.

"OK, so let me fix that. There, does that measure look better?" I said after correcting their half rest and placing a quarter rest in its place. "But now look at the next measure, what is wrong with this one?"

Kevin jumping from his seat said, "You did the same thing in that measure, but it's the quarter notes instead." In this measure, I had placed two half notes and a half rest.

“Oh, I did, so what do I do to fix it?” I asked.

“You need to fill in the quarter notes,” said Evelyn, raising her hand.

“There, the notes are colored in. Does that look better?” I asked again.

“Yes!!! The Class responded.”

Reviewing the lines and spaces of the staff, I explained to the students how they would be spelling words out using the quarter notes on the treble staff. They recalled how to do this from the previous class period. While I was sure that not all students were going to be fluent in understanding the concepts they had learned in the past class, I knew that I would be able to walk around throughout the period and provide them with extra scaffolding when needed. “What I would like you to do now is to take the rest of our time today and work with someone to fix your compositions. Find a buddy who will help you proof read your paper, and make sure the person is someone that you don’t normally work with in your classroom. When you are finished, try playing it on the instruments we have set up.”

“What if we finish?” Kyle asked.

“Well, that’s when you go and start spelling words with the treble staff. The worksheet is over by our pencil sharpener.”

Many of the students did not work in one group continuously. Instead, when they were having a problem, they would go and ask different people in class, who they observed doing well. Throughout the course of the class, I could not listen to the dialogue going on due to the assistance I provided to some of the students while they were performing. As the students finished their compositions, they moved to the performance station set up for them to try to put sound to their melodies. As the students

performed, they were able to recognize the correct notes; however many of them had difficulty associating the rhythmic value of the notes into the performance. Despite this, the students often responded that they were happy with how their composition turned out. As the students finished, they were asked to spell out words using the notes on the treble staff provided (See figure 17). Liza completed her work early and asked if she could spend the rest of time playing her composition over and over again.

...ole note on the line or space each letter number...

B E G	A G E	E G G	B E E
D E A D	F A D E	F E E D	D E A F
A C E	B A G	E B B	C A B
D E E D	B A B E	C A G E	E D G E
D A D	R E A D	R E D	G A G E

Figure 17: Liza's worksheet

Throughout the class time, all students were engaged in different ways. While all the students were working independently, they were all assisting each other when help

was needed. As some students worked on performing their compositions, they discovered that they enjoyed playing instruments more than composing. However, when asked, they clearly understood that one activity was linked to the other. This self-guided teaching and application of their musical knowledge impressed me. My only concern would be if they would be able to continue this due to their lack of experience playing music from notation on instruments.

### **Where Do I Go From Here?**

At the start of our next class period, before I could follow my lesson plan to continue scaffolding the concept of reading and writing music on the treble staff, the students began a discussion on music composition and what they had learned from it so far. Many of the students expressed what they liked or dislikes about the process and what could be changed to help them. I have shared their comments below from their final interview.

Abbey: Well, I think it's fun.

Ivan: I like that after we finish we get to show it to other people and try to play it. It lets me show off what I just learned.

Peter: I like composing and playing musical twister. It helps me remember everything we learn in the class. And it's a lot of fun.

Nate: Well, I think remembering all the beats in the notes is hard. I always am checking to make sure I did it right.

Nate: Yeah, but I don't like that we have to remember all of it to write it all down.

Steve: I don't know how to say it, um, it gives me something to do.

Liza: I like that we get to play our compositions on the instruments. Then I know what

my songs sound like when I'm finished.

Mary: Well I don't like composing music. It's hard.

Mary part II: Well I don't like having to remember all the notes and where to put them. It was a lot easier when you told us where they should go and what we should do.

Evelyn: I like the games that we have been playing with your homework. I think they are fun and they are helping me learn how to read music a lot better.

Leo: I think that this is all pretty easy, because I already knew how to do it.

Fred: Since I play the violin I think it is easy because I'm used to it.

Julia: I don't like it. It's too hard. I don't like trying to remember the lines and spaces of the staff. It was easier when it was just the notes.

Andre: I like composing songs. It is fun when we get to go to the instruments and play them. Then I get hear them and see if they sound good.

Sabrina: I like learning how to play the songs we write. I know that later we are going to get to use them to learn something new in music.

Mary: I know that when I forget the notes or I am having a hard time, I can ask a friend for help. That sometimes helps me when I am stuck, but we don't get to do that all the time.

James: I think that composing gets you into the music. When you get to play it then other people get to hear it and know what you mean.

Sabrina: I think that being able to play instruments and read music is going to make it easier for people (students) to learn more.

Julia: I like that everything we are learning right now, we are seeing in other things we are learning about when we are not in music class.

Jason: I like the games we play. They help me remember all the notes and how to read music. They are a lot of fun too.

Andrew: Yeah, I think twister today was a lot of fun. I would rather learn how to read and write music that way. Writing compositions is hard. I don't remember all the notes when we do it.

Rebecca: I like the compositions. I want to be a song writer one day, so I think it's important for me to be able to write music.

Lynn: I like learning through our games. I remember more when we get to play them.

Ann: Yeah, when we play our games we are reading music and writing music, and it makes it fun.

Yanna: I like that we are doing compositions; we get to play them when we are done. I think that that is a lot of fun, and we get to hear what they sound like.

Steven: I like playing the instruments too. It's fun to hear what the compositions sound like when we are finished.

Rebecca: I don't like doing the rhythm reads. I think they get boring doing them every day.

Rebecca: Well, it helps us read music, but I think we could do something else to do that at the beginning of class.

Rebecca: Yeah, I think that would be neat.

Andey: I think that composing music can get boring too. All we do is write music.

Andey: I like when we get to play our compositions when we are done.

Andey: I think that would be awesome, because then we would get to play and all have a chance to play.

From the group discussion, I could see that many of the students feel that learning how to read, write, and play, music had been an encouragement for them to want to learn more things in music. The largest complaint from the students in the class was that they were being required to apply their newfound abilities without any help from the teacher. I believe this more so because they are fearful of making a mistake in front of their peers and believe that if they would make a mistake for me I would be more understanding and help them through their struggle. I have also come to see that some of the restrictions that have been placed on the students' creativity to this point in time have stifled their learning instead of developing it. Since I have limited their range of rhythmic notation, as well as the assigned pitches on the staff that the students must use, they feel that they are just following my directions and not being allowed to be creative. I now understand that the students are asking for more freedom with their projects. If I provide the students the opportunity to use unlimited range of pitches, including lines and spaces, as well as letting them use all rhythmic notation they have learned, students will be able to more freely express themselves through their compositions. When allowed to develop creatively with limited restriction, they will use their knowledge of reading and writing music in the same manner. I am concerned though that through applying these skills so openly, that the student will be overwhelmed and become lost in their own musical jails. It could create an experience for those students where they will end up losing sight of what the composition and reading and writing music is to do. Instead, they will attempt to complete the project by placing notation randomly on the treble staff, thus negating any progress.

In retrospect, I thought to myself, perhaps this was the problem the entire time. Writing my next lesson plan, I decided to eliminate all but one more of the students' composition assignments, since it was a restricted composition where students would be asked to compose using only the lines of the staff. Instead, I would lead right into the final project where students would be allowed to use all notation and all lines and spaces of the treble clef. It would also be through the elimination of this project, that the students would be provided with more time to ensure that they were not only composing more creatively, but focus more on the understanding of what they were writing down. In so doing the students would be able to develop ownership of their of music and then would show their growth in their knowledge of reading and writing music. It would also be through this extended time, that I would be able to provide differentiated instruction to all of my students and help them understand the various applications of rhythmic and musical notation on the treble staff. Through this, I would ensure that these students would not lose any education opportunities, or develop a lack of understanding of the core knowledge needed to read, write, and play music.

### **The Final Composition**

After students arrived for the next class, they sat down and we discussed our final composition for the study. Originally, I had hoped to get two more compositions into the study, but following our final interview last week, I felt that the students were ready to complete the study with their final compositions and begin preparing for a performance on the xylophones and metalophones in the classroom. It was my hope that through to completion of their compositions, the students, both identified and not, would be able to now transfer their knowledge into an audible melody. Because the xylophones had the

pitches labeled on the bars, there would be little confusion as to the transfer of pitches from the page to the instrument.

I began by demonstrating some of the handwriting I would be looking for while they used both the lines and the spaces of the staff to help model how to draw notes so that whoever read their compositions would know the placement of notes on the staff. I knew by this point in the school year, a majority of the students, including Peter, Kevin, and Gared through their discussion and work, were able to understand the duration of notes and their relationship to a time signature. My largest concern was that of melodic contour, since I had not spent much time on this. I felt that many of the students would then become more focused on developing what I thought would be an appropriate melodic contour, rather than developing their own creative expression. While many of the students had developed an understanding of what rhythmically comprised a melody, they would now be able to apply this knowledge to the rise and fall of pitch with a phrase or melody. I assigned students partners to ensure that the groups were comprised of students who would work well with one another. “OK, everyone, all I want you to do is make sure that when you are working with your buddy that you think, will they be able to read it?” I explained.

Walking around the room, I was happy to hear the excellent dialogue that was going on within the groups. The students were actually helping each other with melodic contour, and even though they did not realize it, they were also helping each other proof read. Without any instruction to do so, many of the students exchanged papers and marked in pencil the notes that were written too large, and could not be identified as a line or space note. They also marked if there were too many beats or not enough in a

measure. Then, Veronica a student who had difficulty throughout the unit, walked up to me. “We don’t get it,” she said, showing me her blank pages.

“Well, what’s the first thing you need to do? I asked. I could also see that Veronica’s partner was also having some difficulty understanding what to do.

“What could we do here to finish this measure?” I asked.

“I could put two quarter notes in the measure,” he responded.

“What could we do to make sure that we have enough beats here?” I responded.

“Um...I should write the beat numbers under the measures,” he said.

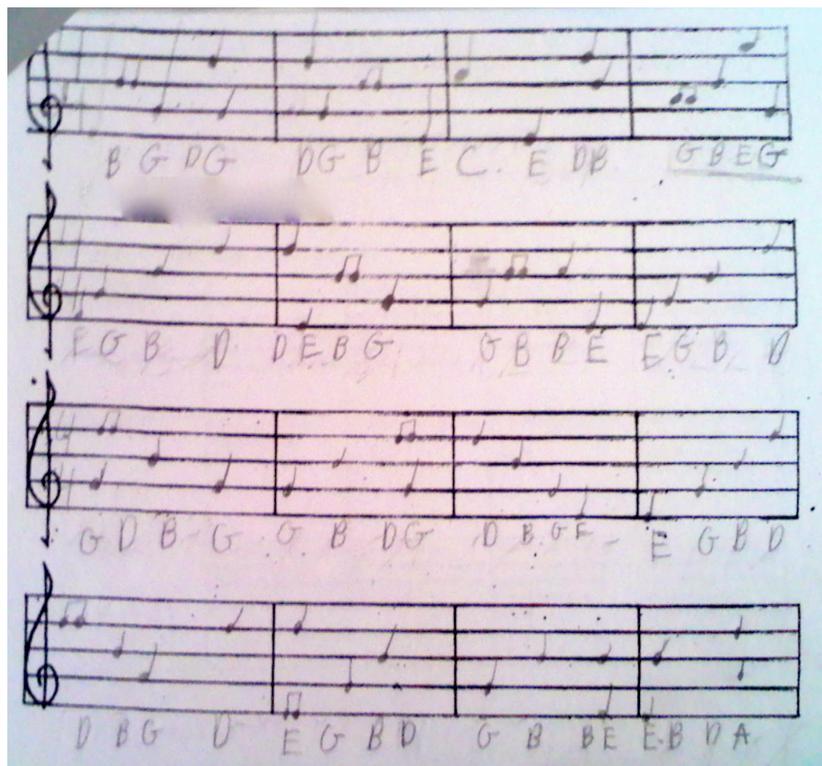
“O.K. How do you think this will sound if you place those note in that order?” I then asked after watching him complete two measures.

“I’m not sure but the notes are going up one at a time. I think it will be good,” he said with confidence.

Through this pattern of question and answer I could see he was gaining the understanding he needed, and he went back to their spot to complete his composition without and other help from me. Veronica, however was still having difficulty completing the work. She clearly demonstrated her lack of confidence by writing notation on the paper, walking up to me, and asking me to look at it. Every time she came back I would ask her what was wrong, she would identify it, then would correct any mistakes she had in front of me, walk away and then come back with two more notes written in her composition for me to look at. I became frustrated with her, because it was becoming obvious that she did understand what was expected of her, and I did not know how to help her since most of my attempts were failing. Recreating my scaffolding, I began back at basics. Reviewing rhythmic values with Veronica, we practice placing

single quarter notes within a measure; we proceeded by added new simple notations into a composition. These notations included quarter rests, eighth notes, and half notes. It was only once Veronica was able to play rhythmic values correctly within a measure that we were able to move on toward composing using only the spaces of the staff, at first two spaces, then three, and finally four. It was during this time, I could see that Veronica was slowly starting to understand the correlation between the concepts of rhythmic value as well as their placement on the staff for sound. Seeing this understanding, I added the lines of the staff and began the composition her partner and she were to be working on during this class period. Under my supervision, I watched Veronica compose three measures with very little assistance from me. Both of us feeling confident that she was able to complete her composition independently, Veronica rejoined her partner.

Walking around the room, I heard wonderful statements of peer teaching from the groups. “I think you need to write the notes bigger, like this.” Samantha said to Peter as they were reading through each other’s work. After working with Veronica, I walked over to Gared, who was writing neatly, but placing the incorrect number of beats in each measure. As the class progressed, I continued to guide him to observe his mistakes and correct them. At the end of class, Gared had completed a composition, which included correct beats in a measure, and a melodic line (See Figure 18).



*Figure 18: Jared's final composition*

As I watched the students, I could see that the students overall, were showing creativity with their music compositions, seeing the melodic contours and rhythmic interest, which were appearing within their compositions. It was interesting to see how students such as Peter and Kevin were having no problem composing, which in contrast to several other their classmates who now seemed to be struggling more than their counter parts. Through their interactions, it could be observed how the students who were labeled as special needs became more confident. Through their body language, leadership rolls, and the discourse with their classmates, Students such as Steve had moved from being quiet and unsure of themselves to the stars of composition. Seeing

this, I was looking forward to seeing these students develop the skills to perform their compositions.

### Let's Make Some Noise

As the students began to play their compositions on the xylophone during our next class period, I noticed that many of them were having difficulty transferring their knowledge of performing rhythmic notation with that of the pitches that should be played on the classroom instruments. I called the class back to attention and modeled how to align the notes and rhythms that they had written with those on the xylophone. Unfortunately, this did not seem to help most students, and the more students practiced, the more frustrated they became.

Realizing that there was a disconnect of learning going on, I asked the class to stop what they were doing and return to their seats. I explained to the students that I now realized that what I had asked of them was too much for right now. "What I want you to do, everyone, is eventually to be able to read music like it is on your paper in time, but to be successful, there's a little more for us to do together." As I continued, the class and I reviewed the names and spaces of the staff. Through this process, we began to label the notation on a sample composition I wrote on the whiteboard (See Figure 19). It was through doing this activity, I hoped the students would be able to see and understand what the alteration to the activity would be.



Figure 19: sample composition

I explained to the students that writing the letters of each pitch under the staff might help them. The students then spread out around the room and began working on this project. As I walked around the room guiding students through identifying the notation, I could see that a different group of students was having difficulty with this assignment. Steven had expressed some difficulty with identifying the order of pitches on the staff, but when I reviewed the staff individually with him, he was able to complete the assignment on his own.

During this lesson, I realized that the students were not ready to perform music without any markings to guide them. It would take another class before the students would be ready to even think about taking their melodies to play on an instrument. As I explained the next steps of finishing labeling notes and practicing, the students began to develop a newfound exuberance for the concept of performing their compositions.

#### **The Next Lesson.....**

Students returned for their next class on the last day of school prior to the Thanksgiving Break. Explaining that the students were to practice their compositions today on their instruments, I reminded them that they should not follow the letters and rhythms they had marked out on their compositions last class. The last class many of the students had expressed difficulty attempting to read the notation and identify the pitches at the same time. Because of this, I explained that if they were having difficulty that writing the letter names of the pitches underneath the staff would be ok. "A lot of times musicians may have problems with remembering a note and do that." I explained. Handing out their papers, I saw that many of the students had not written the letters

underneath their notes. “I see that a lot of you didn’t finish your letters yet to start practicing.” I stated.

Fred spoke up. “Well a lot of us don’t need them, Mr. B. We have been practicing them without.” I had forgotten that some students had asked if they could try playing their compositions without the letters to show me that they were ready to read music without the help of the annotation.

“All right then. All I have to say is take your time. It may not be easy at first, and I am not expecting it to sound like your composition is ready for a performance. Just see how much you can improve by the end of class,” I asked.

The students broke into groups and some worked individually, and others worked with partners. Over the course of the class period, many of the students asked me to listen to their compositions. Walking from group to group, I was impressed as the students participated in discourse and critical analysis the students were participating in. I noticed that many of the students sounded as though they were ready to perform, over half of the students raised their hands. Once I explained how to practice so that they students who were still practicing would not make too much noise, I began to record the students.

I could hear that many of the students were following their rhythmic notation to some extent, although it was obvious that they were very uncomfortable performing in front of me, which made them rather nervous and the performance choppy. The students were quite successful, though, identifying all the notes they performed correctly. The only exception to this were the F and E. Since there were two Fs and Es, one on the line and one on the space, the students often identified the letter but not the correct note. I

knew this to be due to the students still developing the skills needed to perform music on a pitched instrument.

As student recorded their compositions, I began to take notice that the students with a gifted designation in this class, while ready to perform, did not wish to do so. They indicated wanting to perfect their compositions before recording. While this was good, I had a hard time explaining to them that being perfect was not something that I was looking for. This was just for fun right now; nobody was expecting perfection. This response formed a sharp contrast to the designated special needs students, all of whom wanted to record their work.

Could it be that the gifted students, while able to understand the information, were able to perform but lacked the self-confidence because they feel they must always be right in the eyes of the peers? If this is the case, why is it that the designated special needs students have the confidence to perform, but sometimes lack the patience to work through the problems they encounter? As a music teacher, I want students on both ends of the spectrum to overcome these educational and social hurdles. The only solution I could come up with after pondering this observation was to provide additional time to practice. Through differentiating instruction and helping each student independently, I hoped to guide the students through these difficulties toward success.

#### **How Did the Student Work Fare?**

The students within this class created a variety of melodies while composing. Through the processes, the students' handwriting was legible and provided the reader or performer with ample understanding of how it should be performed. Through labeling the pitches in their compositions, the students provided correct identification of the



### The Grand Finale

The final step had begun. The students were going to perform their compositions not just for me, but for the entire class. As we performed, the group had decided that they wanted their compositions recorded so that we could make a class CD when the project was done. Throughout the process, many of the students took their time and performed their compositions with broken meter, focusing on the correct pitches rather than the indicated rhythm. I believe that this is because the students are still fairly new at reading musical notation and playing it. Therefore, the students value the correct sound of the pitch rather than focusing on the correct rhythm. Major difficulties that were seen throughout the processes from a majority of students were the reversal of line and space F and E as well as the reversal of measures, reading them right to left instead of left to right when performing them. I found it interesting that the students who were doing this had not been identified with any sort of reading disability. As I observed this, the students knew that they had done this and voiced that they were not happy with their public performance. "I didn't read that right, Mr. B." Jason told me, as he explained how he read his music right to left instead of left to right (See Figure 21).



Figure 21: Jason's composition

“I think I played the wrong F to here,” he said pointing to a spot on his composition where he should have played a high/line F, but instead played a low/space F.

The students who take instrumental lessons with the school district’s instrumental teacher, demonstrated the most polished performances, at least in part to the development of their skill outside of the general music classroom. However, despite their abilities, some of these students were uncomfortable performing their compositions on an unfamiliar instrument, leading me to wonder if some of the students encountered difficulties because of the instruments that were being used to play their compositions. Perhaps some of the compositions were too complicated for them in terms of the hand eye coordination and transferring the melody from written notation to the instrument.

Overall, the students and I were pleased with the performance of their compositions. While the challenges enumerated here prevented students from doing as well as I had thought they would, I came to the realization that this was their first time performing their piece for me and really using instruments. Despite the difficulties they had with reading their compositions in rhythm or reading it backwards, the students demonstrated a great deal of growth in their comfort with reading, writing and performing music in any form.

In watching Peter, Gared, Veronica, and Steve, I could see that while they had gained a great deal of knowledge as well as the ability to read music, they had a greater difficulty than their classmate in transferring this knowledge of reading and writing music to performing. This could most strongly be seen in Gared’s performance, where he performed an almost improvised composition rather than that of what he has spent so much time writing. The difficulties in performing their compositions continued through

Peter, Veronica, and Steve, to the point where Peter became frustrated and stopped playing because he did not feel comfortable. Because I knew he was having difficulty, I assisted him by helping him transfer the music note by note pointing to the bars which should be hit at what time. Veronica, while having successfully completed her compositions, had not yet developed the skills to transfer her reading of musical notation to that of produced sound. In contrast, Kevin performed his composition without difficulty. Performing a well-written composition, he demonstrated that he was able to learn and transfer his knowledge of reading and writing music to a classroom instrument in the time given during class.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Scaffolding**

*Through a series of carefully scaffold learning activities, diverse third grade students have demonstrated the ability to become independent learners of reading and writing music.*

Throughout the process of the study, students were guided through the learning process by a series of lessons in which they supported one another's learning in a variety of group activities. Through these groups, all students, including those with disabilities, were provided with opportunities to learn. By doing so, the students were provided with an education within their zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky (1978), "...The zone of proximal development is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). This "zone of proximal development" is the space between a child's true growth shown through his or her ability to solve problems alone and the possible growth of the students, which is demonstrated through solving problems with the help of teachers, adult family members, or classmates.

Throughout my study, I attempted to use Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development to develop student skills of reading, writing, and performing musical notation independently and creatively. Through their work in small, heterogeneous groups, the students received the support needed to learn not from repetitive activities, but rather from a setting where a collective knowledge guided all student to their individual solutions (Ormrod, 2003). As the students began to learn to

write music, they relied upon their “more knowledgeable other” for guidance to develop new understandings. As the groups work together, I walked around the room to provide guidance and assistance as needed. As the students worked within their groups, the students with disabilities were helped by their group-mates. Through this process, the students guided each other using their strengths to create their final compositions. It could be observed that while this originally was intended as a system to provide added guidance for students such as Peter, Kevin, and Steve, in the end, these students often became the leaders within their groups. Students, such as Peter, Kevin, and Steve, despite their I.E.P.s and disabilities, which are well known to their classmates, now had served as their more knowledgeable other throughout the study first through assistance in composing and then later in practice and performing their works. It was through the application of teacher observation and student interaction within their groups, that Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” was applied.

This could clearly be seen as the students began working on their third composition. By this time in the study, the students had already learned to read and identify all the notation expected of them at this point in the curriculum as well as the lines and spaces of the staff. The students were paired with each other to peer edit or conduct what I have called a “Buddy Check” on each other’s papers. The students quickly sat down with one another and began working on their independent compositions. Throughout the process, the murmurs of student discussion resounded throughout the music room. Walking from group to group, I noticed that many of the students were stopping after two or three measures, switching clipboards, and reading through their partners’ work.

“No, you have too many beats here. Remember the notes are only worth one beat,” I heard Gared’s partner say to him. When I examined his paper, he had not finished much. With his partner’s guidance, however, he had written a melody, which demonstrated all correct music theory, reading and writing, and also a melodic line, which provided interest and creativity.

“I don’t think I’m going to get it done today,” Gared said to me in a concerned voice.

I told him that it was ok that he had not finished and that he could work on it the following week as well.

In contrast, Vernica, who had not been identified as a special needs learner, had great difficulty understanding the transition of rhythmic notation to that of staff notation. While being assisted by her partner, Veronica lacked the confidence to complete the task without checking in with the teacher regularly. Despite her abilities, and working with a student who was her more knowledgeable other, she continued to struggle. It was through our interaction, that it became apparent that Veronica was fearful of leaving the comfort of the scaffolding that I had provided her. Through this processes, I had to recreate a new “Zone of Proximal Development” by developing new individualized scaffolding, which Veronica would become more independent, and develop the confidence in her knowledge she required to complete her composition

### **Discourse**

*As teacher modeling gives way to independent and partnered activities, special need students will take charge of their own learning as they work with their “more*

*knowledgeable others” during group work, thus functioning in their zone of proximal development.*

Throughout the processes of the study, the students were provided with many opportunities to work independently and with a partner, relying on each other rather than on the classroom teacher to find answers to problems as well as develop the creativity to compose music. Through these creative opportunities, students engaged in discourse with their more knowledgeable other, thus providing an opportunity for music literacy to manifest itself. Sharing musical compositions demonstrated the students’ ability to use their aural and oral skills, as well as their knowledge of reading and writing music notation. Interacting with one another and learning in this manner also demonstrated students’ ability to learn independently from the teacher, thereby demonstrating the latter stages of scaffolding where teachers play a supportive role rather than that of a director (Byrne, Halliday, Sheridan, Soden, Hunter, 2001).

This could be seen more apparently throughout the processes of the students practicing for the performance and recording of their compositions. Despite his identification as a special needs student, Kevin was able not only to perform a successful composition, but he became the Vygotskian more knowledgeable other for his fellow classmates. Through their discussion, Kevin’s label melted away as several of his classmates asked for his help through his ability to critique their performances, or guide them through re-writing portions of their compositions that they both found a little uneasy to listen to. It was because of his abilities to read and write music that he then was able to listen to other pieces of music and develop a well-formed opinion of them. This, in turn, encouraged and guided his classmates through his modeling of these skills.

It was during this time period, I could observe a noticeable change in the interaction of the students not only within each other but with me as well. Through the development within the students' respective zones of proximal development and with the help of their more knowledgeable others, the students were now demonstrating the ability to participate in classroom discussions surrounding single pieces of music (Haywood, 2006). Through their more strongly developed ability to listen subjectively to a piece of music, they would be able to identify the form and structure of the piece. In doing so, they could also move through obvious areas of listening, such as rhythms to more in-depth conversations describing tone color and mood and how different composition choices would have created a different outcome.

#### **Music Literacy and Music as a Language**

*Through composing music and demonstrating the ability to read the notations they have written, students are able to then demonstrate their fluency in music literacy through performance on classroom instruments.*

As the students became more fluent in reading, writing, and performing music, they all began to develop an understanding as to how musical notation was indeed its own symbol system. Vygotsky (1978) states, "Unlike the teaching of spoken language, into which children grow of their own accord, teaching of written language is based on artificial training. Such training requires an enormous amount of attention and effort on the part of teacher and pupil and thus becomes something self-contained, relegating living written language to the background" (p. 105). Through the process of learning the spoken word a child may grow and develop according to his or her needs and speed. This sort of evolutionary growth is not developed within the realm of the written word.

Instead, the educators must take large amounts of time to construct and train students through what Vygotsky considers a plastic “artificial” system. This, in turn, isolates the written languages from spoken language forcing them to be learned as separate entities.

I believe that this quote from Vygotsky expresses this main theme of written and spoken language within the context of my study. When a child learns piano he or she musically learns by coordinating the learning of the symbolic musical notation and the instruments at the same time. In playing music, students are now speaking in musical terms. This example can most strongly be seen in the manner in which many students, including identified special needs students in this study, developed the skills to perform not only their own compositions. Working together, practicing and performing, students such as Kevin, Peter, and Steven discussed concepts in their compositions with their classmates that they may have simply overlooked or not have been aware of prior to this point in their musical development. The development of these skills is clear evidence of the students’ ability to transfer aural skills to that of the written notation seen or written on the page.

The students within my third grade classroom have been playing musical instruments since they were in kindergarten. They have had, however, very little knowledge as to the notes being played or notation; it is now through this composition unit, that Kevin, Gared, Steven, Peter, and their classmates, developed the ability to read musical notation on the staff and began to discover a new purpose for the classroom instruments (Dogani, 2004). As students composed melodies within their music classes, they were expected to practice them and play them using the classroom instruments. It is through these abilities that students will continue to develop musically and demonstrate

growth through personal expression, melodic themes, and the addition of harmony (Glushankof, 2002). Through this process students are now combining their skills of reading and writing music to playing these classroom instruments, and the demonstration of music literacy by demonstrating music literacy by “speaking with the instruments.”

### **Achievement**

*As students achieve music literacy, they further their knowledge of music history, form, appreciation, style, and listening skills.*

The purpose of my study was to find how the mastery of the symbols related to reading and writing musical notation lead to the skills of music literacy among special needs students. Vygotsky (1978) addresses the concept of written language improving students’ growth when he says, “It, the present research, has paid remarkably little attention to the question of written language as such, that is, a particular, system of symbols and signs whose mastery heralds a critical turning-point in the entire cultural development of the child” (p. 106). In reflection of this quote, it is clear that this is still an emerging topic one hundred years later. It is through my study of music literacy acquisition that I have endeavored to learn more about this important developmental process.

As I began my study and started looking for resources, I was surprised to see how little was to be found in the area of music literacy. As I reread Vygotsky and reviewed the music education research literature, I discovered that to this day, the question of how symbolic notation, when combined with the spoken word, can encourage growth within students has not been thoroughly examined. Through my literature review and teacher action research study, I have discovered that when students use their abilities to read

symbolic language (in this case musical notation), in combination with their ability to speak a language, and play an instrument, their ability to make connections to the “outside world expands.” During an interview with my three classes, I found that many of the students are now able to comment knowledgably about music they hear on the radio, TV, in the car and elsewhere. Through their ability to use their aural and oral skills to apply their music literacy knowledge to their favorite pop songs as well as commercials or other music hear on TV, the students are showing their fluency of music literacy and how understanding how to read and write music can impact their everyday lives.

### WHAT NEXT?

It is now March and for two months, the third grade has been learning to perform music on recorders for their spring concert. It has been interesting to see their development on these instruments. As each class makes its way through, the students seem to develop more quickly than their counterparts from prior years. Observing them, I can hear that many of them are now more focused on the technical process of play rather than the music I have projected up onto my whiteboard. “That’s because reading the music isn’t the hard part. It’s making sure that we are using the right fingers now,” Peter explained to me one day recently. Over these two months, many of the students have expressed that learning early on how to read and write music has prepared them for learning how to play instruments in my classroom. I have also heard positive feedback from the instrumental teacher, who explained that she has observed a stronger base of music theory for the new students since my strong focus on music literacy began.

As the students near their performance date and music is now memorized, I look back on all the work we have done together. I look towards the next big topic, which needs to be tackled in my music classroom. With recorders tooting away in the background, I realize that the greatest challenge will be to continue these students’ growth in music literacy for the years to come. Through fostering their learning of music I hope to encourage and understanding of music which will stay with the students for the rest of their lives.

In asking myself, how would students would benefit from the addition of technology to their music literacy, I have begun the process of discovering the multiple ways in which students can become fluent in music literacy. Could it be that using

programs such as Garageband and Finale will encourage a larger growth? Through their ability to identify notation and sound more quickly on a computer program, could students from all learning backgrounds be able to develop inventive and insightful compositions? These are all questions that have crept into my mind as I discover new computer software and its applications in the music room.

With these questions in hand, I have now begun researching literature on these computer programs and am planning on attending workshops where I will be able to learn more about their applications within my music room. As I plan my new lessons using these forms of technology, I will be looking for the ways in which the students with various learning abilities will grow in their music literacy. Observing their interaction and discourse with their classmate, how students use their knowledge of musical notation as well as their aural and oral skills to create music in programs such as Garageband, and how strongly will the applications of these forms of technology affect their achievement in music.

While the year is winding down, and the exhaustion from collecting my literature and data have finally sunk in, I look toward the summer where I plan on rejuvenating myself through thinking toward next year and how I will start the processes anew. At the moment these plans seem so far off in the future, I have learned the teaching through action research has not only made me a better teacher, but has helped my students reach towards achievements they did not even know they could.

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**APPENDIX****Appendix A: MENC National Standards 1994**

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Perform on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts. And disciplines outside of the arts.
9. Understanding music in relations to history and culture

**Appendix B: HSIRB Approval Letter**

August 8, 2008

Benjamin Becker  
[REDACTED]

Dear Benjamin Becker:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "What are the observed and reported experiences within the third grade music classroom when musical composition encourages the growth of music literacy and knowledge for special needs students?" Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone ([REDACTED]) or through e-mail ([REDACTED]) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks  
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review  
Board  
Moravian College  
[REDACTED]

### Appendix C: Authorization for a School to Serve in a Research Study

**Project:** The purpose of this study is to measure the success of implementing the concept of implementing music literacy to increase the education of students in an inclusive primary classroom. Data will be measured and collected from September 6, 2008 until December 20, 2008 at which time it will be analyzed for the final report.

**Researcher:** Benjamin J. Becker

Phone: [REDACTED] ext. [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

**Employment Affiliation:** General/Vocal Music Teacher

**Supervising University Professor:** Dr. Joseph Shosh

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to apply the concept music literacy to improve the students' retention of music within an inclusive primary classroom.

**Procedures to be followed:** Lessons will be created as a collection of learning concepts which students will be expected to apply in various styles throughout the lesson. To provide proof that students are retaining and applying information, student work will be collected. In addition to student work, data collected will include; observation field notes, surveys, and journals.

Persons who will have access to the records, data, or other documentation:

[REDACTED], Dr. Joseph Shosh, and Mr. Benjamin Becker

I understand that participation in this project is voluntary, and I understand that a parent or guardian may withdraw their child from this study at any time without penalty by notifying the researcher.

[REDACTED]

The participation of the students in this project is confidential. The researcher will use pseudonyms to mask the identity of the students.

Please check the appropriate bow below and sign the form:

- I give permission for Mr. Benjamin J. Becker to conduct the aforementioned teacher action research in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade General Music Classroom.
- I do not give permission for my school to participate in this project.

Signature of Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D: Informed Consent Form Authorization for a Minor to Serve As A  
Research Participant**

Dear Parents/ Guardian,

I am currently pursuing my Master of Education degree at Moravian College. In fulfillment of the program, I must participate in a action research study involving my classroom practices. In so doing, I will be able to improve my teaching and benefit each child's education. From September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008 until December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008, I will explore the effectiveness of incorporating music literacy into a third grade class. During this process I will be measuring the class's ability to retain new music concepts from week to week. I am writing to ask permission to use the data I collect from your child for analysis in my thesis. All children will be participating in normal music class activities, and research participants will have no additional responsibilities, that would not be required of them outside a regular class.

During the period of time in which I conduct the study, lessons will be set up in a manner that asks students to reflect on past lessons and apply what they have learned previously and apply it through reading and writing music. During the study, I will analyze both student work and my own classroom observations. I will gather additional data through classroom surveys and interviews.

I anticipate that the benefits of participating in this study will include an improved understanding of musical concepts, a greater appreciation for music, and a greater sense of music's importance to other subject areas. Only I will have access to the data collected during the span of this study, and I will mask student identity through the use of pseudonyms.

The use of data from your child is voluntary, and you may withdraw your child from the study at any time without penalty. You may contact me at any time regarding your child's participation. My phone number is [REDACTED] ext. [REDACTED]. My faculty advisor is Dr. Joseph Shosh, and he may be reached at [REDACTED]. Principal [REDACTED] has approved the study.

- I give permission for my child's data to be used in this study I have read this form and understand it.
- I do not give permission for my child's data to be included in this project.

Students Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix E: Music - Composition : Rhythmic Composition

Teacher Name: **Mr. Becker**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

CATEGORY	3	2	1	R - Redo
Meter and Rhythm	All measures have the correct # of beats and a variety of rhythms are used. Including the use of Whole, Half, Quarter, eighth. and sixteenth notes.	85% of measures have the correct # of beats and a variety of rhythms are used. Including the use of Whole, Half, Quarter, and eighth notes.	70% of the measures have the correct # of beats. Rhythms are very basic and do not expand beyond quarter notes.	Under half of the measure have the correct # of beats. Composition needs to be edited and resubmitted.
Music Notation	All notes are written neatly using proper barline placement.	Most notes are written clearly using the proper barline placement.	Notes are written clearly, but barline placement is often incorrect.	Notes are written in a sloppy and illegible manner. Barline placement is not correct. Needs to be resubmitted.

### Appendix F: Music - Composition : Simple Melody

Teacher

Name: **Mr.**

**Becker**

Student Name:

CATEGORY	3	2	1	R - Redo
Meter and Rhythm	All measures have the correct # of beats and a variety of rhythms are used. Including the use of Whole, Half, Quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes.	85% of measures have the correct # of beats and a variety of rhythms are used. Including the use of Whole, Half, Quarter, and eighth notes.	70% of the measures have the correct # of beats. Rhythms are very basic and do not expand beyond quarter notes.	Under half of the measure have the correct # of beats. Composition needs to be edited and resubmitted.
Music Notation	All notes are written neatly using proper barline placement.	Most notes are written clearly using the proper barline placement.	Notes are written clearly, but barline placement is often incorrect.	Notes are written in a sloppy and illegible manner. Barline placement is not correct. Needs to be resubmitted.
Overall Performance	The composition was creative, clean/easy to read, and included all required elements.	The composition was somewhat creative and legible. Most of the required elements were included.	The composition was very basic and somewhat legible to read. At least half of the required elements were included.	The composition was not complete, and very difficult to read. Under half of the required elements were included. Project will need to be revised.

**Appendix G: Beginning and End of Study Interview Questions**

What do you think we will be doing when we write music?

What will we need to know to read and write music?

After we write a composition how should we perform it?

How many of you are comfortable with reading and writing music?