

## **Teacher Educator Perspectives on Music Integration in the Preparation of Preservice Elementary Classroom Teachers**

By

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### **Abstract**

*In this survey research, I examined teacher educators' perspectives regarding music integration in their music methods courses for pre-service classroom teachers. Previous researchers have defined music integration levels and styles. In the current study, half of the teacher educators defined music integration in terms that reflected the highest levels of integration, focusing on authentic relationships between disciplines, while 44% defined music integration in ways that evoked the lowest levels, placing music in a secondary role. Most participants indicated that they integrated music with other areas of the elementary curriculum, and many shared circumstances that promoted or inhibited the inclusion of music integration strategies. Among the circumstances that teacher educators saw as promoting music integration were individual course content and design, overall program structure, and buy-in from various stakeholder groups. Conversely, lack of faculty interest or expertise, limited instructional time, and concerns about students' musical confidence and expertise were among the reported barriers to prioritizing music integration in their coursework. This article concludes with a discussion of these findings and suggestions for future research.*

**Keywords:** pre-service music teachers, music integration, elementary classroom teachers

## Background

Elementary classroom generalist teachers can have an enormous influence on their students, in part, because of the vast amount of time they spend with their classes. Ideally, classroom teachers develop positive relationships with their students, make instruction engaging and relevant, and promote collaboration and critical thinking. Music integration can be a powerful tool for classroom teachers to employ in reaching these goals. Although there has been considerable research concerning arts integration, especially studies exploring pre-service and in-service K-8 classroom teachers' perspectives on music integration (e.g., Battersby & Cave, 2014; Hash, 2010; O'Keefe, Dearden, & West, 2016; Reinke & Moseley, 2012) and the impact of methods courses and professional development experiences on participants' perceptions about music integration (e.g., Berke & Colwell, 2004; Colwell, 2008; Siebenaler, 2006; Zhou & Kim, 2010), researchers have not attempted to determine the extent to which music integration is valued or understood by teacher educators. Understanding teacher educators' perceptions about music integration is an important step toward advancing meaningful music integration by K-8 generalist classroom teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to focus on general education and explore the perspectives of higher education teacher educators regarding music integration and the preparation of future elementary classroom teachers. The research questions defining this study were:

1. How do elementary teacher educators define and describe music integration?
2. What circumstances do teacher educators perceive as either promoting or inhibiting the inclusion of music integration frameworks in teacher preparation programs?

## **Classifying Curricular Integration**

Jacobs (1997) defined interdisciplinary curriculum as an "approach that consciously applies methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic or experience" (p. 8). Implicit in this definition are the ideas that teachers thoughtfully design high-quality instruction, that students meet standards in each curricular area, and that students explore authentic relationships between disciplines. These ideals are also emphasized in the Kennedy Center's professional development program, Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA), in which arts integration, one facet of interdisciplinary pedagogy, is defined as "an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process that connects an art form and another subject area and meet evolving objectives in both" (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, para 1).

Bresler (1995) opened the discussion about different expressions of arts integration by describing four distinct arts integration styles, (a) subservient integration, where the arts serve other disciplines (e.g., memorizing song lyrics to help remember a set of facts); (b) affective integration, where the arts affect mood or inspire creativity (e.g., playing background music to help students relax or concentrate or drawing while listening to music); (c) social integration, in which the arts serve a social function (e.g., musical presentations at school board meetings); and d) co-equal integration, where understandings in the arts and another discipline are equally valued and recognized (e.g., exploring the concept of contrast in music and literature). Bresler's co-equal style of arts integration positions music as "equal partner, integrating the curriculum with arts-specific contents, skills, expressions, and modes of thinking" (Bresler, 1995, p. 33). Other researchers have also described models for categorizing integrated lessons (Banks & McGee Banks, 2006; Rosenbloom, 2004; Snyder, 2001; Wiggins, 2001). In every case, the

integration levels ranged from what Bresler labeled as subservient integration to what Bresler labeled as co-equal integration. Regardless of the specific labeling of arts integration approaches or styles, researchers also agreed that lower levels of integration were those most commonly encountered in schools and that upper levels represented a "vision of what integration should be" (Wiggins, 2001, p. 42).

Wiggins (2001) developed a set of categories describing five levels of curricular integration, partially in response to Bresler's four arts integration styles. Wiggins' Level 1 connections described teaching situations in which music served as a memory or learning tool for other disciplines, aligning with Bresler's subservient style. Level 2 connections were those in which music enriched another subject, again facilitating academic learning in another discipline. Thematic or content-based units involving music and another discipline that could result in either authentic or trivial connections depending on the chosen theme characterized Level 3. Level 4 connections described integrated lessons in which music and another discipline addressed common concepts that extended beyond curricular boundaries. In Level 5 connections, processes common to music and other disciplines were the focus.

### **Music Integration in Practice**

The structure and content of music methods courses for undergraduate elementary education majors (K-8 general education) have been the focus of many studies (e.g., Berke & Colwell, 2004; Colwell, 2008; Propst, 2003). Curriculum integration is often a component of those methods courses. While pre-service classroom teachers are generally supportive of music integration, previous research indicates that they also report a lack of confidence about teaching music (Giles & Frego, 2004; Hash, 2010; O'Keefe et al., 2016). Several researchers have explored the impact of music methods courses in elementary classroom teacher preparation

(Berke & Colwell, 2004; Reinke & Moseley, 2012; Zhou & Kim, 2010). For example, Berke and Colwell (2004) examined pre-service classroom teachers' perceptions before and after participation in a music methods class focused on music integration. They identified positive changes in participants' confidence in teaching music and views related to integrating music into the elementary curriculum. Similarly, Zhou and Kim (2010) investigated the impact of participation in an integrated methods course on pre-service classroom teachers' perspectives about teaching in an integrated way. They found that pre-service teachers' skills and attitudes related to curriculum integration were enhanced by their participation in the course. Additional strategies to enhance elementary classroom teachers' application of interdisciplinary frameworks include scheduling fieldwork and student teaching placements with a deliberate focus on music integration (Donahue & Stuart, 2006) and providing teacher training in collaboration (Della Pietra, 2010; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Strand, 2006).

There is a lack of existing research examining teacher educators' perceptions of music integration. In one indirectly related study, Zhou and Kim (2010) provided a detailed account of the collaborative planning in which they engaged when designing and delivering an integrated methods course focused on science, mathematics, and music. They described the role of the collaborative process as significant, highlighting the development of advanced techniques in delivering integrated lessons and determination to continue utilizing integrated methods.

## **Methodology**

**Participants.** I designed an anonymous online survey and secured IRB approval to explore teacher educators' perceptions regarding music integration. For this study, "teacher educator" was defined as a person in higher education who taught music education coursework and/or methods courses for undergraduate elementary general education majors. To situate the

study, I limited my investigation to institutions in the 15 states associated with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) that were accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) to certify elementary classroom teachers in undergraduate programs.

Using the CAEP Accredited Provider Directory (2017), I identified all institutions within WICHE states that were accredited to certify elementary classroom teachers in undergraduate programs. Using this list of 56 accredited providers, I accessed each institution's website to identify email addresses of teacher educators assigned to teach music methods courses for elementary majors. In cases where no music education coursework for elementary education majors was specified or where no teacher educator was identifiable, I called the institution directly to determine if that specific coursework existed at the institution and to obtain the appropriate faculty member's email. This process resulted in a pool of 52 potential respondents for the survey. Of the possible participants, 22 completed the survey for an overall response rate of 42%.

**Survey design.** I developed a survey specifically for use in this study following a review of literature, utilizing Wiggins's (2001) five categories of curricular integration as a construct for examining teacher educators' perceptions regarding the value of a variety of music integration activities.

Following feedback from three practicing teacher educators who are experts in the field, I revised my initial draft survey then emailed the current version to teacher educators. The first section of the survey focused on participants' backgrounds, including formal training in music, formal training in music education, years of K-8 teaching experience, years of experience teaching in higher education settings, and current teaching setting. Next, to examine music

teacher educators' perspectives regarding music integration, I asked them to define music integration in their own words. Additionally, I constructed a Likert-type scale and asked participants to indicate their perception of the value of activities representing Wiggins's (2001) categories of music integration using a 5-point scale. To determine the extent to which music integration activities were occurring in participants' methods classes, I asked them to indicate the percentage of their teaching that included the integration of music with other subject areas. I utilized additional open-ended questions to gather descriptive, narrative responses regarding participants' perceptions regarding circumstances or strategies that promoted or inhibited music integration in their teacher education methods courses.

**Data analysis.** I analyzed data focusing on teacher educators' definitions and descriptions of music integration using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. I utilized descriptive statistics to analyze demographic information and other characteristics of participants and to analyze responses to Likert-type survey items. Additionally, I utilized the Kruskal-Wallis test by ranks to determine if there were significant differences between teacher educators' demographics/background and their perceptions of music integration. To enable a numerical comparison of their perceptions, I generated a single derived score for each participant representing their overall perceived value of music integration. I utilized participants' ranking of Wiggins' five categories of music integration, multiplying their ranking of each level's value (ranging from 1 = *not valuable* to 5 = *highly valuable*) by the number associated with that level (ranging from 1 = *level one memory tool connections* to 5 = *level five process connections*), then adding their scores from each category. I chose to use the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test after I graphically and numerically determined that the data did not follow a normal distribution. My analysis involved a visual inspection of a histogram followed with the Shapiro-Wilk test of

normality, which was appropriate for my small sample size. I ran seven individual Kruskal-Wallis tests comparing derived scores representing teacher educators' perceived value of music integration with seven characteristics related to demographics and background.

Following multiple readings of all textual responses, I first coded the survey item that contained teacher educators' definitions of music integration. For this initial analysis, I utilized inductive techniques, looking for emerging patterns as well as themes that were unique to specific individuals (Creswell, 2014). Next, I utilized deductive techniques and applied Wiggins's (2001) categories of curricular integration as additional units of analysis (Creswell, 2014). This procedure resulted in three categories of definitions, each with representative quotes. I applied the same process to all remaining open-response questions.

To account for social desirability bias as a potential limitation to the study, I utilized an anonymous survey. Additionally, although the results of this study should not be assumed as generalizable, as one of the few studies examining teacher educators' perceptions of music integration, it invites dialogue regarding the incorporation of music integration strategies in music methods courses for pre-service elementary education teachers.

## **Findings**

Characteristics of respondents. Of 52 possible participants, 22 completed the survey for an overall response rate of 42%. Concerning respondents' educational background, 85% reported formal training in music, and 75% reported formal training in music education. Some participants reported that they taught music methods for elementary education majors at their school as one component in a more extensive "arts methods" course. These teacher educators may specialize in visual arts, dance, or drama, rather than music, but still serve as the instructor of record for the required arts methods course that includes music education. Participants varied

in years of teaching experience, with experience in K-8 contexts ranging from 0-34 years, and experience in higher education contexts ranging from 1-35 years. Regarding the prevalence of music integration, almost all teachers indicated that they integrated music with other areas of the elementary curriculum; however, 82% of teacher educators reported that less than half of their class time was devoted to teaching the pre-service teachers about integrating music across the curriculum. Respondents reported teaching at a variety of institutions. Most taught at mid-sized (40%) to large-sized (30%) schools, and most taught at public institutions (95%), with 40% describing their location as rural, 15% as suburban, and 45% as urban. Table 1 presents participant demographics and backgrounds.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics and Backgrounds

Demographics/Background	<i>n</i>	%
Formal training in music		
Yes	17	85.00
No	3	15.00
Formal training in music education		
Yes	15	75.00
No	5	25.00
Years of experience teaching K-8		
Less than 10	9	47.37
10-19	7	36.84
20+	3	15.79
Years of experience teaching higher education		
Less than 10	12	60.00
10-19	6	30.00
20+	2	10.00
Percentage of teaching that includes the integration of music with other subject areas		
0%	1	5.88
1-10%	1	5.88
11-20%	4	23.53
21-30%	4	23.53
31-40%	1	5.88
41-50%	3	17.65
51%+	3	17.65
Current institution setting		
Rural	8	40.00

Suburban	3	15.00
Urban	9	45.00
Public	19	95.00
Private	1	5.00
Current institution student enrollment		
1-2,500	2	10.00
2,501-5,000	2	10.00
5,001-10,000	2	10.00
10,001-20,000	8	40.00
20,001-50,000	6	30.00
50,001+	0	0.00

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**Definitions of music integration.** Of 22 total participants, 18 (82%) chose to define music integration. Analysis of the definitions revealed three main themes that characterized the distinct ways in which respondents viewed music integration: (a) authentic relationships between disciplines; (b) music serving a supporting role; and (c) music as a discrete discipline. Nine respondents (50%) defined music integration in terms of authentic relationships between music and other disciplines. Within this set of definitions, respondents expressed the need to equally value each discipline included in integrated lessons, to address standards in each discipline equally, and to emphasize valid connections between disciplines. Typical responses from this category highlighted the need to “maintain and celebrate the integrity of both academic areas” or described the importance of “exploring large, high-level concepts the disciplines have in common.” Eight respondents (44%) defined music integration in ways that placed music in a subservient role. Included in this subset of responses were definitions that focused on music’s role in facilitating learning in other academic areas, music as a supplement or an add-on to other lessons, and music’s function in terms of promoting student engagement in interdisciplinary lessons. Characteristic responses from this category defined music integration as “using music to help elementary students review and learn concepts in other areas of the curriculum,” as a mnemonic device, or as a memorization tool. Finally, three respondents (17%) did not directly

define music integration. Instead, those individuals affirmed the importance of music as a discrete discipline. One participant stated, “Music should be a part of every school’s curriculum, separate from music integration,” and another noted, “Music is an integral part of a complete education...as a subject itself.”

**Promoting music integration in teacher education.** Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents shared one or more circumstances they believed promoted the inclusion of music integration strategies in elementary teacher education music methods courses. Among those responses, the most frequently cited circumstances (52%) dealt with course content and design, specifically, the incorporation of dedicated assignments, opportunities for active engagement, and exposure to high-quality exemplars focused on music integration. Respondents recommended specific content connections, such as links between music and literacy, and one respondent advocated for collaboration between music and non-music teachers at the higher education level. In a typical response, one participant suggested the following sequential strategy: “Using supportive research to demonstrate its [music integration’s] effect and importance, observing examples of successful teachers, then utilizing music within other curricular areas.”

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the responses included program structure as a circumstance with the potential to influence music integration in elementary teacher education positively. Respondents noted the importance of a dedicated, required course for exploring music integration frameworks with one participant stating that numerous opportunities to reinforce music integration skills over multiple semesters were ideal. Additionally, respondents commented about the essential nature of field experiences and student teaching placements to allow pre-service elementary classroom teachers to focus on music integration practice.

Relatively few respondents described the importance of different stakeholder groups endorsing music integration. Among the respondents who shared circumstances that might promote music integration in elementary teacher education courses, 3% mentioned the role of administration, 7% mentioned the role of students, and 10% mentioned the role of faculty. Of those who noted teacher educators' role in fostering the inclusion of music integration strategies, there was only one reference to faculty expertise.

**Impediments to music integration in teacher education.** Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents offered one or more insights about circumstances that inhibit the inclusion of music integration strategies in elementary teacher education music methods courses. The factor that participants most frequently described as impeding music integration was a lack of interest and/or expertise among faculty (30%). This participant articulated a representative response: "My role as a teacher educator involves teaching about music, but not necessarily trying to integrate musical skills and concepts with those of other disciplines." Another respondent noted: "Teaching integration strategies is outside my teaching responsibility. Music integration is not as important as developing musical skills."

Participants described issues concerning course structure and content in 26% of the responses related to music integration impediments. A commonly shared frustration was the lack of instructional time within music methods courses. One respondent noted, "There is too much musical content to worry about content in other subjects, too." Another cited the "limited or nonexistent opportunities for pre-service classroom teachers to perform or teach musical content."

Twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents noted elementary education students' lack of musical confidence or expertise as a factor that impeded the inclusion of music integration in methods courses. One subset of these responses was constructive, pointing toward students with undervalued musical abilities and understandings. For example, one respondent discussed the idea that students' lack of confidence in their musical abilities "is an effect of how music is taught...people with specific musical literacy are considered more advanced than those who don't read music, even though the performance skills of the 'non-reader' may greatly exceed those of the 'reader.'" Similarly, another respondent argued against the "idea that engaging in music requires high levels of formal expertise." A separate subset of the responses about students' musical abilities was more negatively focused. For example, one respondent described education students as having a "lack of musical understanding or abilities...other than the ability to press play on a CD player."

Respondents also described issues related to program structure (17%), with many noting concerns about a lack of time within the overall elementary education curriculum. One participant stated, "There are so many CAEP standards we have to meet that it is difficult to fit in extra content that isn't directly tied to a standard." Another voiced a specific concern: "There are limited music/art opportunities at my university." There was also a single mention of the negative impact that an unsupportive administration might have on music integration.

**Results from Likert-type items.** In the survey, I wanted to explore participants' perceptions regarding the value of each of Wiggins' five categories of music integration. Rather than specify Wiggins' levels, potentially biasing respondents, I instead described "hypothetical categories of music integration" and asked participants to choose a number that reflected their

perception of the value of those activities. One may see survey descriptions of Wiggins' five levels of music integration, participants' mean values, and standard deviations in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Mean Ranks and SD of Teacher Educators' Value of Music Integration Activities (1 = *not valuable*; 5 = *highly valuable*)

<i>Wiggins' Levels</i>	<i>Survey Description of Categories of Integration</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Level 1	Music as a vehicle through which facts or information can more efficiently be learned and remembered (For example, singing a song to memorize the presidents of the United States in chronological order)	4.00	1.05
Level 2	Music is utilized to enrich another subject (For example, listening to songs about the water cycle in science class)	3.89	.99
Level 3	Music is incorporated into thematic or content-based units (For example, a school-wide focus on a theme like the Harlem Renaissance)	4.56	.96
Level 4	Skills and knowledge in music and another subject utilized to explore a common concept (For example, studying repetition in music and history)	4.17	1.01
Level 5	Exploring similarities in the processes students use in music and other disciplines (For example, drawing connections between ways the writing process is utilized in music and in language arts)	4.00	1.20

I used the Kruskal-Wallis  $H$  test to determine differences between teacher educators' demographics/background and their perceptions of music integration. I completed seven separate Kruskal-Wallis tests comparing derived scores representing teacher educators' perceived value of music integration with seven characteristics related to demographics and background. None of the mean ranks from the tests were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ); therefore, this study did not

reveal any relationship between teacher educators' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of music integration.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Of the teacher educators who chose to define music integration, 50% described it in terms of authentic relationships between music and other disciplines, aligning with Wiggins' upper levels of music integration and Bresler's co-equal integration style. An additional 44% of teacher educators defined music integration in ways that aligned with Wiggins' lowest levels and Bresler's subservient integration style. These results may help to explain previous literature in which researchers noted that practicing elementary classroom teachers primarily utilized the lowest levels of integration (Bresler, 1995; Giles & Frego, 2004; O'Keefe et al., 2016; Wiggins, 2001). If only half of the pre-service elementary education majors are presented with definitions and descriptions of music integration at the highest levels, it is not surprising that many of the music integration practices we encounter in elementary classrooms place music in a secondary role. Finally, around 6% of teacher educators who elected to define music integration instead chose to affirm the importance of music as a discrete discipline. Perhaps those teachers did not have working definitions for music integration, or perhaps they intended to express the value they saw in studying music in isolation.

When I asked teacher educators to describe circumstances or strategies that promoted music integration in elementary teacher education contexts, approximately a third of respondents described circumstances related to program structure. Respondents perceived strategies such as adding elements to the required curriculum, modifying field experiences, and adding to student teaching placements as ways to promote music integration; however, changes at the program level may be beyond a faculty member's direct control. While changes to the overall program

design may not be practical or possible for teacher educators, options likely exist for individual faculty members who wish to modify their own course material or approach. Aligned with that reasoning, over half of the strategies to promote music integration mentioned by teacher educators involved course content and design. Previous research supported many of the circumstances suggested by respondents including practices related to active engagement (Bresler, 2002; May & Robinson, 2016), exposure to high-quality exemplars (Hallmark, 2012; Wiggins, 2001), the promotion of collaboration (Della Pietra, 2010; O’Keefe et al., 2016; Strand, 2006), and the use of specific content connections (Colwell, 2008; Hallmark, 2012; Snyder, 2001; Zhou & Kim, 2010). Teacher educators interested in elevating the role of music integration in their courses might consider adopting one or more of these strategies.

A few respondents only mentioned administrator support, student desire, and faculty endorsement as circumstances that promote music integration. Perhaps some teacher educators viewed administrators’ support as inconsequential, perhaps respondents were not familiar with their administrators’ positions regarding music integration, or perhaps administrators’ roles were assumed to be included in survey responses concerning program structure. Similarly, perhaps individual faculty members’ roles were assumed to be included in survey responses concerning course structure. Of the responses which specifically mentioned faculty, only one respondent referred to the role of faculty expertise as an important factor in promoting music integration. Perhaps teacher educators believed faculty expertise in music integration did not bear mentioning because they assumed that those teaching music methods for elementary education majors were generally experienced in interdisciplinary strategies, or perhaps specific training and expertise was not seen as an important factor in promoting music integration.

Conversely, when I asked teacher educators to describe circumstances or strategies that inhibited music integration in teacher education contexts, approximately a third of respondents described factors related to faculty disinterest and/or lack of expertise. This suggests that while faculty expertise may not be seen as promoting music integration, the lack of faculty expertise is seen as an impediment. Comments related to a lack of faculty interest in incorporating music integration frequently highlighted a preference for developing students' musical skills and spending class time on musical concepts, rather than on integration, suggesting that some teacher educators value the discipline of music in isolation more than they value integrating music with other subjects.

Approximately one-quarter of responses regarding factors that inhibit music integration were concerns about the lack of instructional time in music methods courses for elementary education majors. In every instance, respondents voiced their concerns about time constraints separately from their concerns about faculty interest and expertise, suggesting that teacher educators see these factors as unrelated. A given faculty member may or may not value music integration, while still feeling that their instructional time is limited. A final subset of responses concerning barriers to music integration described teacher educators' perceptions that many pre-service elementary classroom teachers lack the musical skills and understandings necessary to complete their music methods courses successfully. Although these concerns align with previous research in which the diverse musical ability of students enrolled in music methods courses for elementary education majors was identified as a major challenge (Battersby & Cave, 2014; Berke & Colwell, 2004; Colwell, 2008; Giles & Frego, 2004), the frustration expressed by some teacher educators in the current study indicated a potential bias against students with a limited

musical background. It may also indicate a misalignment between student learning outcomes for the course with the prerequisite skills and experiences necessary for success.

My statistical analysis did not reveal significant relationships between teacher educators' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of music integration; however, a straightforward examination of the raw demographic data highlights an unexpected and potentially problematic result. In the survey, respondents were to confirm that they were teacher educators. Respondents' self-reports of their music and music education backgrounds show that 15% of teacher educators who deliver music education coursework to undergraduate elementary education majors lack formal training in music, and 25% lack formal training in music education. This is likely because some faculty who deliver methods courses are part of education departments, rather than music departments. Additionally, music methods may be offered in a single combined arts methods course, and faculty expertise may lie in an arts area outside music. Exploring the competence and confidence of teacher educators was beyond the scope of the current study and needs to be examined; however, it is disconcerting to see that faculty who deliver music education content lack specific training themselves.

In addition to investigating teacher educators' competence and confidence regarding the delivery of music integration frameworks, I recommend future research that examines teacher educators' interest in delivering music integration content and explores the nature and prevalence of music integration activities in undergraduate methods courses for elementary education majors. To address teacher educators' expressed dissatisfaction with the musical abilities of pre-service classroom teachers, future research regarding appropriate models of differentiation in music education methods courses, strategic professional development for faculty, and intentional restructuring of music methods courses and elementary education programs may foster

innovative solutions to appropriately meet students' needs. Finally, I recommend that all faculty who teach music methods courses for future elementary classroom teachers persevere in intentionally defining, describing, planning for, and modeling music integration experiences at the highest levels.

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