ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION:
A STUDY OF ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC TEACHER
ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

by

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INTRODUCTION

In January 1994, the National Association for Music Education (MENC) published the *National Standards for Arts Education*, which included nine voluntary content standards for music education. The standards, developed by the National Committee for Standards in the Arts, were guidelines for what students should know and be able to do in the arts as a result of instruction in grades K-12. The national standards in music include: (1) singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music; (2) performing 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 the arts; and (9) understanding music in relation to history and culture (MENC, 1994b).

The National Standards for Music Education defined what every child should know and be able to do in music. They presented music teachers with a goal to take responsibility for their teaching and make the changes necessary to implement them. By providing objectives for student learning, the standards also clarified what should be assessed in the music classroom. Implementation of the standards raised the question of how to evaluate student achievement of these standards in the elementary general music classroom. In order to investigate this question, the current study will focus on elementary general music teachers’ assessment of the national standards.
Attempts to implement and assess the National Standards for Music Education revealed some difficulties for music teachers such as large numbers of students and lack of student contact time. Elementary general music teachers traditionally have large numbers of students. While general education elementary teachers may have 25 to 30 students to assess, music teachers often have hundreds. The prospect of keeping records and grading paperwork for hundreds of students could be overwhelming for some teachers. In addition, music teachers might see their students only once or twice a week, typically for 30 to 45 minute lessons. Given the short amount of contact time with the students, many music teachers likely have to prioritize their lessons and assessments. Lack of time makes it difficult to cover all of the national standards, let alone assess them all.

Assigning report card grades can be especially difficult for elementary music teachers due to the large number of students they service. Since music classes usually meet only once or twice a week, it is possible that teachers may not have enough data at the end of a marking period to accurately assess student achievement. In addition, many music teachers seem to struggle with the role that effort should play in assigning music grades. Student effort is not the same as student achievement and should be separated for purposes of assigning grades. Unfortunately, some people seem to think that music class is just for fun and that students should be given good grades based on effort instead of musical ability. Students are not given good grades for effort in subjects such as math and science. Student achievement in music should be measured and graded the same way it is in other core subject areas.
Music teacher schedules also affect their ability to assess the national standards. Many music teachers work in multiple buildings and have to carry supplies back and forth between their schools. This type of travel schedule makes it difficult to prepare lessons or assessments that require multiple materials or a lot of time to set up. Teachers often finish a class in one building and drive to another building with little time to travel or prepare for the next class. In addition, available resources might differ between buildings. Possible resources include: music books, a variety of musical recordings, audio/visual equipment, folders, paper, writing utensils, a variety of rhythm instruments, and Orff instruments. Lack of certain resources may affect the types of assessments chosen by music teachers. For example, it would be very difficult to have students listen to recordings of music from other cultures or to do assessments on listening skills in a room without audio or visual equipment. In order to adequately teach and assess the national standards, all music teachers must be supplied with the necessary resources.

Public perception often has an impact on music programs. Unfortunately, music education is often viewed as an extra-curricular activity instead of a core academic subject. The majority of the school day is devoted to subjects such as math, science, and language arts. In elementary schools, music classes are frequently used as a way of providing planning time to the general education teachers. This sometimes creates a hierarchy in school buildings where the fine arts teachers, or "specials teachers," are not viewed as real teachers. Regrettably, the fine arts are also considered expendable when budget cuts become unavoidable for a school. Music teachers may be asked to teach more classes or to travel between
multiple buildings in order to save the school district money. As a result of these changes, there is often a decrease in student contact time and a reduction to the quality of the music program. Sadly, many schools eliminate music programs altogether as a way to save money. To keep this from happening, music educators need to constantly work to raise public awareness on the significance of music in education. It is important to make parents, administrators, and community members aware of the learning that takes place in the music classroom. One way to achieve this is to systematically assess student achievement and routinely report this achievement to students and parents. While concert performances are demonstrations of the learning that takes place weekly in music classrooms, they may be viewed as simply entertainment by people who don't know what goes on in a music classroom. Concerts should not be the only demonstration of musical learning that occurs each school year. Music professionals need to educate the public by documenting student achievement of class objectives and using this documentation to raise awareness of the National Standards for Music Education.

Now that the National Standards for Music Education have helped music educators unite in teaching common objectives, we need to investigate the use of common assessments as well. There is a need for more research to investigate the types of assessments currently being used by elementary general music teachers in their classrooms. Few studies have been conducted to trace general music teachers’ attitudes and practices in regards to assessment of the national standards. Further research is needed to determine which national standards are assessed most frequently and which assessment practices are used most often to assess the
standards. The purpose of this study is to investigate the strategies that are being used in elementary general music classrooms to assess the National Standards for Music Education as well as factors that influence teachers' frequency of assessment and assessment practices.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

National Standards for Music Education

A number of initiatives have contributed to substantial changes in arts education during the twentieth century, including the National Standards for Arts Education and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Goodwin, 2000). In March 1994, a consortium of professional arts education organizations recommended a set of National Standards for four areas of arts education: dance, drama, music, and visual arts. President Clinton later signed the recommendations into law in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Byo, 1997). Setting national goals can help the country focus on improvements that need to be made in the schools (Jennings, 1998). The Goals 2000: Educate America Act did this by turning national goals into law. This act was also important for arts education because it named the arts as a core subject area.

Mark (1995) provided a brief history of how the arts came to be included in the Goals 2000 legislation. His article stated that federal programs have supported parts of arts education, at least minimally, since the 1950s. For example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, P.L. 89-10, allowed many students to participate in music and the other arts by allowing school districts to hire music teachers and purchase instruments for schools in low income areas. In 1978, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization bill became the first legislation to offer direct support for arts education by stating that the arts should be an important part of every student’s education. Despite these advances in arts education policy, the arts were still not being treated as an important part of
education. In response, the National Education Association published "Toward Civilization: A Report on Arts Education" in 1988. This report highlighted the problems facing arts education and recommended providing arts instructors with the time and resources necessary to deliver a quality arts education program.

MENC soon realized that it needed to promote music education to policy makers as well as the general public and worked to determine clear guidelines for arts education (Mark, 1995). In 1994, this work paid off with the Goals 2000 legislation which defined benchmarks for arts education grades PreK-12. Though voluntary, these standards were developed by a combination of organizations and individuals; educators, parents, artists, and professional organizations. A consensus was reached regarding what students should know and be able to do in the arts as a result of PreK-12 instruction in dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts (MENC, 1994b).

The National Standards for Music Education defined the components that constitute a quality music education program and signaled the beginning of change in music education (Straub, 1994). For the first time, the arts were established as a discipline in which every young American should demonstrate competence. Music has been an important part of American schools since 1837, but instruction has varied widely from state to state and from school district to school district (MENC, 1994c). By defining standards for music education, a clear goal was set for curricula and music education across the nation, thus providing music educators with the means to develop comprehensive music instruction across the country.
In order to help music educators implement the national standards, MENC published a series of booklets. The first booklet, *The School Music Program: A New Vision* (MENC, 1994c) gives three purposes for its publication: (1) to create a coherent vision, (2) to provide a foundation for building a curriculum in music, and (3) to help improve the music curriculum. There are nine voluntary national content standards in music, with specific guidelines for grades K-4, 5-8, and 9-12: (1) singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music; (2) performing 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 the arts; and (9) understanding music in relation to history and culture. The standards are designed to show the national consensus for the highest priority skills and knowledge that students should have acquired upon exiting grades 4, 8, and 12 (MENC, 1994c).

MENC also published the booklet, *The Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Music Education* (1994b) to complement the National Standards for Arts Education and focus specifically on music education. It included guidelines for curriculum, scheduling, staffing, materials, equipment, and facilities. Resources such as these are necessary for music teachers to implement the national standards. Without proper staffing, scheduling, or facilities, it would be very difficult for schools to meet the content standards in music. Because these standards were not included as part...
of the Goals 2000 legislation, elementary schools are not required to implement these guidelines (Byo, 1997). Consequently, music programs vary widely between elementary schools across the nation.

The voluntary National Standards for Music Education define what every child should know and be able to do in the arts, but how does one determine whether or not this goal is accomplished? Ways must be found to determine whether or not the content standards have been met (MENC, 1996c). Standards define what we want students to know and be able to do, so they have a strong impact on student assessment. In fact, the standards help clarify what should be assessed (Shuler, 1996). According to Shuler (1996), with the implementation of the National Standards for Music Education in 1994, music teachers would be required to assess the extent to which the students have achieved musical learning as defined by the standards. For this reason, standards and assessment are very closely linked.

MENC published its’ third booklet, *Performance Standards for Music: PreK-12* in 1996 to assist music educators with strategies and benchmarks for assessing student progress toward the national standards. Within the book, each of the nine content standards is broken down into smaller achievement standards. The performance standards are based on the following assumptions: (1) every student can learn music; (2) music instruction should begin in the preschool years; (3) assessment in music is not only possible but necessary; (4) the purpose of assessment is to improve learning; (5) assessment of student learning is not synonymous with evaluation of teaching or evaluation of instructional programs; (6) assessment in music requires various techniques in various settings; (7) reports to
parents should be based on standards; and (8) caution is needed in interpreting assessment results. (MENC, 1996b, p3-6)

The National Standards for Music Education have had a great impact on all aspects of music education from what is being taught to how it is assessed. Many music teachers now use the national standards as guidelines for teaching and objectives for student learning. Assessment in music classrooms has changed as well. In the past, many music educators had not used assessment strategies beyond simple written tests and performance assessments. The National Standards for Music Education helped to expand the assessment strategies used in music and encouraged music educators to teach and evaluate in areas which were previously neglected (Schuler, 1996). Music teachers now use a variety of assessment techniques to determine student achievement and can be held accountable for the learning that takes place in the music classroom.

Purposes of Assessment

General Education

It is important to explore the purposes of assessment in general education to understand why assessment is important. Assessment has many purposes in education including: (1) guiding the instructional process; (2) evaluating teacher effectiveness; (3) measuring student growth; and (4) providing feedback to students and parents.

For example, assessment can be used in education to guide the instructional process. In the book *Measurement and Evaluation in Teaching*, Gronlund (1976) stated that evaluation is a “continuous process which underlies all good teaching
and learning.” Gronlund also listed the instructional process as one of the roles of assessment. In the process of teaching, educators prepare instructional objectives, provide instruction, evaluate the outcomes of their instruction, and use the evaluation results to improve student learning. Teachers can use the information gathered in assessments to guide and refine their daily lesson plans. Assessment can also be used to monitor teacher effectiveness. Gronlund (1976), and Boyle and Radocy (1987) wrote that one function of evaluation is to improve learning and instruction in classroom teaching by evaluating instructional effectiveness. By assessing student progress, educators can also evaluate their own effectiveness in teaching the given objectives.

Another important function of assessment is measuring student growth. Radocy (1989) stated that student achievement is an essential part of the education process and frequent evaluation must occur to measure this achievement. Teachers have a professional responsibility to assess student growth to determine student achievement of curricula objectives. Providing feedback to students and parents is another function of assessment in education. Taylor (2003) discussed several purposes of assessment, including assigning grades and sharing work with parents. Report cards provide an opportunity to inform students, parents, and administrators of student growth.

Assessment is an important part of the educational process and is used frequently in education to guide the instructional process, evaluate teacher effectiveness, measure student growth, and provide feedback on student achievement.
Music Education

Assessment is important in music education as well as general education and has recently become more of a focus for music educators. In the past, music grades often reflected non-musical criteria and did not always provide an accurate picture of a student’s musical development (Lavender 2000). Boyle and Radocy (1987) also wrote that the musical world of the past was too dependent on subjective information as a basis for evaluation. As a result, assessment of student achievement in the music classroom was not taken too seriously and many teachers did not even do it. With the publishing of the National Standards of Music Education in 1994, the philosophy that student achievement in music could be systematically assessed and documented like other core academic subjects became the driving force for change in the way music teachers and administrators viewed assessment in music and the other arts.

As in general education, assessment plays an important role in the instructional process in music education by providing feedback to guide instruction, determining student achievement of curriculum objectives, evaluating teacher effectiveness, reporting student progress towards achieving the goals of the curriculum, and demonstrating the value of the music program. (Nye, Nye, Martin, and Van Rysselberghe, 1992). These functions are consistent with those listed for general education, with the exception of demonstrating the value of the music program. Unfortunately, music programs are often reduced or eliminated entirely when budget cuts become unavoidable in a school system. When the role of music is questioned, it is vital that music educators make the value of music clear to
students and the community. According to Campbell and Scott-Kassner (1995), this message can be conveyed through a clearly stated music curriculum with a sense of the direction in which the students are growing. Assessment provides documentation of student growth and is necessary for program accountability.

In our current political climate the evaluation of schools and student growth have become areas of public concern. The demand for teacher accountability as a function of student learning is just as important in music education as it is in other subject areas. Therefore, it is necessary to assess student progress in a systematic way to document growth over time. If music educators fail to assess and report student progress to parents, it gives the public the impression that music is not a core subject (Regelski, 2004). Music educators must work to change the public perception that music education is frivolous. Using benchmarks to provide a sense of expectations for the students will help counter this attitude on the part of students and parents. Assessment of student progress towards these benchmarks will also help prove to students and parents that real musical learning takes place in the music classroom.

In order to help music educators assess student achievement, MENC (1996c) provided a list of general guidelines for assessment in music. The most important guideline is that assessment should be standards-based and the standards should reflect the music knowledge that is most important for students to learn. Assessment should also be reliable, valid, and an integral part of the instructional process. Furthermore, students should engage in music making activities and be able to demonstrate their musical skills as part of the assessment. Lastly, educators
must keep accurate records of student assessment and the assessment process should be made available for students, parents, and the public to review.

Lehman (1968), discussed assessment in music education in his book *Tests and Measurements in Music*. His ideas on the purpose of assessment in music included evaluating student progress, evaluating the effectiveness of the teacher, appraising the educational process, motivating student learning, establishing standards, and identifying talented students.

The purpose of assessment in music has not changed much since 1968, but it has gained more attention in recent years. The *Performance Standards for Music* published by MENC in 1996 stated that one goal of assessment is to improve learning. This can be accomplished by using assessment to guide instruction, determine student achievement, evaluate teacher effectiveness, report student progress, and demonstrate the value of the music program. Using assessment for these purposes can keep students, parents, and the community involved in music education. Assessment can also help demonstrate the value of music education as music educators work to raise public support for school music programs.

*Types of Assessment*

*Traditional Assessment*

There are many different types of assessment that can be used in the music classroom. Authors such as Gullickson (1985), Colwell (1991), Nye, Nye, Martin, and Van Rysselberghe (1992), Lavendar (2000), and Kotora (2001) discuss a number of traditional evaluation techniques including observation, checklists, rubrics, teacher-made tests, standardized tests, anecdotal records, student self-
evaluation, essay tests, and written projects. These assessment techniques can be used in music classrooms as well as general education classrooms.

Objective assessments, or paper and pencil tests, are a common form of evaluation. These types of tests include short answer, true/false, matching exercises, multiple choice, and essay tests (Gronlund, 1976). These types of written evaluations would be useful in the music classroom to assess student knowledge of composers, music history, or note names and values. However, written assessments would not be useful to determine student achievement of performance skills related to singing or playing instruments.

There are many alternatives to using paper and pencil tests to assess student achievement. One alternative to written assessments is observation. Observation is an essential part of assessment (Taylor, 2003), and is especially valuable in a performance based discipline such as music. “Direct observation provides the only means we have for evaluating some aspects of learning and development (Gronlund, 1976, p427).” In order for it to be effective, however, observation-based assessment must be systematic. This means that all students must be observed often and on a regular basis. Furthermore, the observations must be documented to be credible (Hart, 1994). Documentation includes a written record of the observations on a seating chart, in a grade book, or on a computer. In addition, educators may need to create a system, or use some methodical approach to minimize the time it takes to record these observations.

Anecdotal records are also helpful in keeping an objective record of student achievement. Anecdotal records are factual descriptions of meaningful student
events that the teacher has observed; however, these impressions may give an incomplete picture of student achievement unless an accurate record is maintained. Though they are time consuming, anecdotal records can provide a more detailed description of actual student behaviors than many other types of assessment (Gronlund, 1976). This type of assessment may not be practical for music educators who see large numbers of students and do not have a lot of student contact time.

Rating scales are a systematic procedure for reporting observations. They use a set of characteristics to be judged and some type of scale for indicating the degree to which each characteristic is present (Gronlund, 1976). Whybrew (1971) believes rating scales are the best tool for evaluating musical performances. They can provide a common frame of reference for comparing all students on the same set of criteria. For example, when assessing standard one (singing), a music teacher may use a descriptive scale to determine how well a student is singing. The scale might list the criteria such as singing in tune or singing with expression that must be met for a student to receive each possible letter grade.

Checklists are a method of recording whether or not a characteristic is present (Gronlund, 1976). A checklist does not indicate degree of frequency to which the characteristic is present as a rating scale does, but it indicates the presence or absence of a behavior (Taylor, 2003). Checklists are valuable for evaluating performance skills that can be divided into a series of specific actions (Gronlund, 1976). For example, a checklist for evaluating student performance on recorder might include the following actions: (1) sit straight and tall; (2) place both hands on recorder, left hand on top; (3) demonstrate proper mouth position;
(4) demonstrate proper fingering for the note “B;” and (5) blow gently while saying “too” in order to play notes. The observer should systematically document student progress by placing a check next to the objectives that have been demonstrated. This system can even be used to assess a large group of students (Kotora, 2001).

A rubric is a comprehensive analysis of a task, project, or assignment that describes important criteria according to various levels of quality in a way that provides feedback and evaluation (Regelski, 2004). Rubrics are helpful in assessment because students understand the teacher’s criteria in advance of the assignment. They also provide more specific feedback than checklists or rating scales. Rubrics function as a general scoring guide that help students to understand their task, monitor their work, develop critical thinking skills, and self-assess their work (Taylor, 2003). Rubrics are especially valuable for evaluating performance-based activities such as singing, playing instruments, improvising, or composing.

Another way to gather information about a student is through student self-assessment of their work. For example, students can reflect on their work and develop critical thinking skills through writing in a journal. Students could also watch a video and answer questions regarding different aspects of their performance such as facial expression, posture, or tone color. This type of assessment will help the teacher gather information regarding student behaviors and thoughts (Gronlund, 1976).

**Authentic Assessment**

Traditional pencil and paper types of tests may be used to assess some music standards, but because of music’s performance-based objectives, authentic
assessments are often a better choice. In authentic assessment, the student becomes an active participant in the process of assessment. Student performances, compositions, oral responses, journals, and portfolios are examples of authentic assessment (Boyle, 1996).

Portfolios are a common type of authentic assessment. A number of authors have written about the benefits of portfolio use in general education (Hart, 1994; Brophy, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Abeles, 1995; Campbell, 1995). Portfolios are collections of student’s work assembled over a period of time that document student growth. Portfolios allow teachers to assess student growth, students to become part of the educational process, and a way to communicate with parents. In music, some suggested components of a portfolio are compositions, progress reports, performance assessments, music journals, self-assessments, composer information, tests, practice records, concert critiques, audiotapes, or videotapes.

Audio and videotapes can be used to assess individual or group performances. Rehearsals or performances can be recorded and reviewed later. Specific objectives and criteria should be used when assessing performance from an audio or videotape. (Kotora, 2001). Some traditional types of assessment such as rubrics, checklists, and rating scales may be used in conjunction with authentic assessments to evaluate student achievement. For example, when watching a videotape of a concert performance, the teacher might use a checklist or a rubric to assess each student’s performance or that of the whole ensemble.
Assessing the Standards

In order to help music educators assess student achievement, MENC’s booklet *Performance Standards for Music: Grades K-12* (MENC, 1996b) provides example strategies for assessing each of the nine national standards. Many of the suggested strategies are examples of authentic assessment. For instance, a strategy for assessing the first standard (singing) would be to administer a singing test; students would sing alone or in a group to demonstrate achievement. A similar strategy is presented for standard two (playing instruments): students could perform a playing test, alone or in a group, to demonstrate achievement. For standard three (improvisation), students could improvise an ostinato (repeated pattern) on an instrument as an assessment. Composing music within certain guidelines is a strategy that could be used to assess standard four (composing). For standard five (reading and writing), rhythm clapping tests, sight-singing, or written tests could be used to assess student achievement. Students could respond to recorded music verbally or through movement to demonstrate achievement of standard six (listening). Written responses, more traditional assessments, would work best for assessing standards seven (evaluating), eight (understanding relationships), and nine (history). These strategies could provide a framework for assessing overall student achievement in music.

Assessment of Non-musical Criteria

Sometimes non-musical criteria such as student attendance, participation, attitude, or effort are included as factors in student grades in the music classroom. According to Lehman (1968), grades in music classes should be based on musical
achievement. Students should not be awarded high grades because of good attitude. Lehman states that, “Attitude cannot be an adequate substitute for achievement in music any more than in arithmetic or history (Lehman, 1968 p 81).” Assigning grades based on non-musical criteria can be seen by fellow educators as evidence that there is no serious learning or evaluation occurring in music education (Lehman, 1992). MENC (1996b) agrees and also states that some music teachers place too much emphasis on factors such as effort and attendance, which make it seem as though music is not an important curriculum. One possible solution is to use multiple systems for reporting general music grades; one for effort and one for achievement of instructional objectives (Boyle and Radocy, 1987). Regardless of the report card format, student grades in music need to be based on frequent, documented assessments of student achievement of specific musical objectives.

Research on Assessment

A review of the current research in music education reveals that teachers use a variety of different types of assessment in music classroom. While a number of studies on assessment in general education exist, there have been far fewer studies in music education. A summary of assessment related studies in music education show some significant findings but also reveals areas where research is still needed.

Two studies focusing on assessment in the high school choral area demonstrate a range of beliefs and practices. One study focusing on grading practices in the high school choral music classroom conducted by McClung (1996) showed a conflict in beliefs regarding the role of non-musical factors in the assigning of grades. While the surveyed teachers believed grades should reflect a specific
learning objective, many of them strongly supported considering non-musical skills such as participation, attitude, and attendance in assigning student grades.

Kotora (2001) also provided an important look at assessment practices in the high school choral music classroom by surveying Ohio high school choral music teachers about their use of twelve specific assessment strategies. Responses revealed that the twelve assessment strategies ranked from most commonly used to least commonly used were: concert performance, student participation, student attendance, singing tests, written tests, student attitude, audiotape recordings, individual performances, videotape recordings, independent studies/written projects, check sheets/rating scales/rubrics, and student portfolios. Student participation, singing tests, and concert performances were believed to be the most useful types of assessment by the participants. Written projects and student portfolios were believed to be the least useful types of assessment for the high school choral music classroom. Kotora also discovered that some high school choral music teachers did not know about the National Standards for Music Education. Twenty percent of the participants were not familiar with the national standards and 49% said they were only somewhat familiar. Only 5% said that the National Standards for Music Education influenced their assessment, and 25% said that the standards somewhat influenced their assessment.

Several studies have also been conducted on assessment strategies in elementary music classrooms. In one such study, Brummett (1993) sought to explore alternative modes of assessment for elementary music classrooms. The purpose of the study was to provide a descriptive narrative of two teachers' use of a
specific framework for student evaluation. Brummett concluded that the use of processfolios (portfolios that document student work over time) was a valuable assessment strategy for the music teachers involved in the study because they were able to document student achievement and growth in a variety of ways. The processfolios included things such as written projects, reflections, journal notes, quizzes, tapes, and checklists.

Niebur (1997) studied standards and assessment in the general music classroom. The four teachers in this study continually looked for ways to improve their knowledge of assessment tools, but they did not worry about having a large collection of assessment tools at their disposal. Niebur concluded that the teachers’ first priority in teaching was to provide students with powerful musical experiences.

In another study of the elementary music classroom, Shih (1997) examined the curriculum alignment of 5th grade general music in central Texas. Shih investigated the relationship between state music objectives and the objectives music educators reported teaching and assessing in the 5th grade general music classroom. In this survey, 77.9% of the participants claimed that they assessed the state-mandated objectives. However, not all standards were assessed equally. Participants indicated that singing and listening skills were assessed more than movement and notation skills. Group performance was the most popular way to assess students. Shih also stated that music teachers often hold students accountable for their grades, but consider effort more important than talent.

Byo’s study (1997) indicated that there may be a connection between teacher training and willingness to implement the national standards for music education.
This study focused on classroom teachers’ and music teachers’ perceived ability to implement the national standards for music. Results showed that most music teachers are comfortable teaching the standards for singing and playing instruments, and were moderately comfortable with the standards for reading and notating, listening and analyzing, and evaluating music. However, improvisation, composition, music in relation to other disciplines, and music in relation to history and culture are standards that are not emphasized in most music classrooms because teachers are not as comfortable teaching (or assessing) these standards. Byo also noted that music specialists at the elementary level are mostly unaccustomed to focusing on standards and being held accountable for student assessment of the standards. The music specialists were more open to the idea of implementing the nine music content standards than the general educators. The general education classroom teachers also indicated that they needed the assistance of music teachers to successfully implement most standards. Both groups of teachers indicated a lack of time and resources to effectively teach most standards. If there is a lack of time and resources to teach most standards, this probably affects the teachers’ ability to assess the standards as well.

In 2002, Louk published a study of general music teachers’ attitudes and practices in regards to the national standards for music education which indicated that teacher opinions may also affect teaching and assessment. Through surveys, Louk concluded that there was a difference in teacher perceived importance of teaching each standard. Standard five was considered the most important (reading and notating music), followed by standard nine (relation to history and culture),
standard two (playing instruments), standard one (singing), standard six (listening and analyzing music), and standard eight (relation to other disciplines) respectively. The standard considered least important was standard four (composition), followed by standard three (improvisation), and standard seven (evaluating music). Though this study did not deal with assessment of the standards, it indicates that teacher opinion influences the teaching of the standards and therefore, some standards may be assessed more frequently than others.

A study by Orman (2002) compared the National Standards for Music Education to the way music specialists used their class time. Standard one (singing), standard two (playing instruments), and standard five (reading and notating music) were the most prevalent standards addressed across grades one through six. Overall, results showed that elementary music specialists spent class time on all nine standards, but less time was devoted to the standards that required creative and/or artistic skills from the students. This study showed that all nine standards do not receive equal class time. This is important because it shows that the nine standards might not receive equal assessment time either.

There are many additional factors that may contribute to an elementary general music teachers' ability to assess student achievement of the National Standards for Music Education. Some of these factors are: resources, number of students taught, report card grading systems for elementary general music, teacher experience, teacher attitude towards assessment, and teacher training. It is important to investigate these factors to determine how they influence assessment
practices. This knowledge could help music educators create optimal conditions for effective assessment or improve their assessment practices in spite of these factors.

One study showed that the availability of resources may be an important factor in teacher assessment practices. According to a survey done by the National Center for Education Statistics of arts education in public schools, 94% of public elementary schools had some form of music instruction during the 1999-2000 school year. Seventy-two percent of the schools with music instruction employed full time music specialists, but only 67% of the elementary schools with music instruction had dedicated rooms with special equipment (Carey, Kleiner, Porch, and Farris, 1992).

Possible resources for teaching music include music recordings and listening materials, music books, posters, audiovisual materials, xylophones, rhythm instruments, recorders, acoustic piano, and audio equipment (Byo, 1997). A lack of these resources may influence teacher ability to effectively assess student achievement.

Student assessment may also be difficult for elementary general music teachers due to the large numbers of students they teach. Carey, Kleiner, Porch, and Farris (1992) found that music specialists taught an average of six classes a day. Elementary general music teachers often have hundreds of students spanning three to six different grade levels, and a demanding schedule including extracurricular and professional development responsibilities. With such large numbers of students, elementary general music teachers have limited contact time with each student (Brummett and Haywood, 1997). Furthermore, assessment is time intensive; the large number of students and limited contact time make
assessment in general music classes uniquely difficult. Many elementary general music teachers are responsible for grading 500-600 students every six to nine weeks according to Boyle and Radocy (1987). Since elementary general music teachers typically see each class only once or twice a week, they may have little information on which to base grades for a large number of students in such a short time.

The type of grading system used by school districts to assign elementary general music grades may also be a factor in teachers’ assessment practices. Robinson and Craver (1989) listed several different types of grading systems. There are five point scales (A, B, C, D, F), four point scales (A, B, C, D), three point scales (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory), and two point scales such as pass/fail. Other non-scale alternatives include a checklist of objectives and descriptive grading. Teachers may use more effective assessment practices depending upon the type of grading system they are required to use, but there are no available studies to explore this connection in the elementary general music classroom.

Another possible factor in effective assessment is the number of years of experience that a teacher has. In a study conducted by Anderson-Nickel (1997), the assessment practices of elementary general music teachers with one to four years of teaching experience were compared to the assessment practices of elementary general music teachers with five or more years of teaching experience. The more experienced teachers made notations about individual performance and used seating charts or attendance rolls to keep track of student participation and achievement. The more experienced teachers also had more advanced grading
systems and were more consistent in assigning grades than the less experienced teachers. The primary method of assessment for the less experienced teachers was observation, and they often relied on their memory for keeping track of student achievement instead of notating the information.

Teacher comfort with assessment may also influence teacher assessment practices. Barnes (1985) examined the attitudes of 20 classroom teachers and 20 student teachers towards assessment. The classroom teachers reported that they were uncomfortable with student evaluation and often experienced a conflict between evaluation based on achievement and evaluation based on effort. If teachers are uncomfortable with student evaluation, it is possible that they might assess less frequently. No study has been conducted in music education to explore whether elementary general music teachers are comfortable with student assessment and how this might affect their practices.

Teacher training may influence teacher assessment practices. According to Wise, Lukin, and Ross (1991), most states do not require a course in tests and measurements for teacher certification. Their study on teacher beliefs about training in testing and measurement showed that 47% of the 397 participants believed their measurement training was somewhat or very inadequate. Although this study was not specific to music education, it indicates a general problem in teacher training which may also be relevant in music. Subsequently, Kotora’s (2001) study showed that teacher training influences assessment practices in music education. In Kotora’s study, 66% of the participants believed that their undergraduate college courses did not prepare them much or at all in the area of assessment. Fifty-three
percent of the participants with graduate degrees said the same about their graduate
courses. This shows that college courses may not be providing music teachers with
the training they need in assessment.

In conclusion, assessment of student achievement in music is necessary to
determine student achievement of the goals set by MENC in the 1994 publication of
the National Standards for Music Education. Music educators may choose from
many different types of assessment to evaluate student achievement including
observation, portfolios, checklists, rubrics, rating scales, videotapes, audiotapes,
written tests, anecdotal records, and self-evaluation. However, there are many
factors which may contribute to a music teachers’ ability to effectively assess student
achievement such as resources, number of students, grading system, attitude,
experience, and training.

Purpose of Study

The National Standards for Music Education are important because they
provide all music educators with common objectives to teach in the music
classroom. If music educators believe in the importance of the national standards,
they must also support a systematic and meaningful approach to assessment of the
standards. It is important for music educators to assess student achievement of the
national standards to find out what the students have learned and determine what
objectives have been met.

While there have been a number of research studies on assessment in the
general education classroom, there have been far fewer on assessment in the music
classroom. More research is needed in the music classroom to determine teacher
attitudes and practices in regards to assessment of the national standards. Specifically, there is a need to investigate the types of assessment elementary general music teachers use to assess the National Standards for Music Education and the factors that may influence their use. This information will help music educators develop more meaningful assessments of student achievement. The information could also help schools develop music teacher schedules that allow adequate time for planning and administering these assessments.

This study will investigate elementary general music teachers’ attitudes and practices in regards to assessment of the National Standards for Music Education in grades kindergarten through fourth grade. In the present study, the researcher sought to investigate the following questions:

1. What assessment strategies do elementary general music teachers use to assess the National Standards for Music Education?

2. How frequently do elementary general music teachers evaluate their students on each of the National Standards for Music Education?

3. What factors influence elementary general music teachers’ ability to assess the National Standards for Music Education?

4. What are the attitudes of elementary general music teachers towards assessment of the National Standards for Music Education?

This study is important because it will determine the frequency with which elementary general music educators assess student achievement of the national standards. It will also provide information on the types of assessment that are commonly used in elementary general music as well as the factors that influence
effective assessment practices. This knowledge will help elementary general music teachers reflect on their own assessment practices, as well as help teacher preparation programs better prepare teachers to assess the national standards.
METHODOLOGY

Design

The researcher chose to conduct a descriptive study to evaluate current teacher attitudes and practices regarding assessment of the National Standards for Music Education in the elementary general music classroom. It was determined that a survey would be the best method for obtaining the desired information.

The variables in this study are the types of procedures used by the elementary general music teachers to assess the National Standards for Music Education and the frequency of which the standards are assessed. The survey also investigates the variables that influence elementary general music teachers’ ability to assess student achievement. These variables include the number of buildings the teacher works at, the number of students taught per week, class sizes, teacher experience, teacher training, school resources, teacher opinion of the importance of assessment, the report card grading system used by the participating teachers’ school districts, and the availability of time for assessment.

Sample

The sample used in the current study consisted of elementary general music teachers in three counties in the state of Michigan. The researcher used the 2005 Michigan Education Directory to obtain the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all elementary schools in the specified counties. To narrow down the number of elementary schools being surveyed, only school buildings containing at least one of each grade level from kindergarten through fourth grade were included. Nineteen elementary schools were excluded from the survey based on this criterion.
Many of the school districts in the 2005 *Michigan Education Directory* list websites as well as addresses and telephone numbers. The researcher searched each elementary school’s webpage for the name or names of any general music teachers. For many of the elementary schools, it was possible to obtain this information. Teachers that worked at more than one building were only mailed one survey addressed with their name. Buildings that had more than one general music teacher were mailed multiple surveys, each addressed with a teacher’s name. All of the schools where the name of the music teacher was unknown were mailed one survey addressed to “general music teacher.” A total of 619 surveys were mailed out.

**Procedures**

*Survey description*

The researcher developed survey consisted of four pages of questions organized into the following categories: general information, frequency of assessment, types of assessment strategies, and teacher attitudes (see Appendix A for complete survey).

The first page of the survey was designed to gather general information about the teacher’s school district, schedule, and teaching experience. These questions were intended to investigate the factors that affect elementary general music teachers’ ability to assess the National Standards for Music Education. The participants were asked to answer seven questions to obtain the following information: number of students taught per week, average class size, number of
buildings taught in per week, the school district’s music curriculum, types of report
card grades assigned for music, and years of experience teaching music.

The second page of the survey focused on frequency of assessment. The researcher designed this page to investigate how frequently elementary general music teachers evaluate students on each of the National Standards for Music Education. Thinking of their kindergarten through fourth grade general music classes, the participants were asked to indicate if they never, seldom, occasionally, or frequently assessed each of the nine content standards from the National Standards for Music Education.

Page three of the survey focused on different assessment strategies that teachers may use to assess the National Standards for Music Education. Eight possible assessment strategies were listed; audiotapes, concert performances, observation, rubrics, portfolios, singing tests, videotape recordings, and written tests. Survey participants were asked to indicate which of the assessment strategies they use with kindergarten through fourth grade to assess each of the nine content standards.

The fourth page of the survey contained ten statements designed to determine teacher attitudes towards assessment. The statements had to do with opinions on the importance of assessment and factors that may influence teachers’ ability to effectively assess student achievement. Participants had to respond using a four point Likert scale; indicating if they strongly disagreed, disagreed, agreed, or strongly agreed with each statement.
A pilot study was conducted in the spring 2004 (see Appendix B for complete pilot survey). Nineteen elementary general music teachers from suburban areas in New York and Michigan completed a survey on their assessment methods, frequency of assessments, and teacher opinions on assessment. Descriptive analysis of this data showed that observation was the most frequently used method of assessment, followed by concert performance, singing tests, and rubrics. Portfolios were the least used method of assessments, followed by videotapes and audiotapes. ANOVA tests revealed a significant difference ($p < .05$) between years of teaching experience and teacher attitude about assessing the National Standards. No other significant difference was found between the identified variables. The small sample size was a limitation of the pilot study.

As a result of the pilot study the researcher was able to make revisions to the original survey. The survey was changed to four pages to make it easier to read and understand. In the “frequency of assessment” section, the standards were listed so that the researcher could determine how frequently each standard was assessed. Due to some confusion in the pilot survey, definitions were added for each type of assessment strategy. Lastly, some of the original opinion statements were revised. A redundant statement was removed that dealt with the inclusion of the National Standards for Music Education in general music classes (question four in the original survey). A second question was removed because it sounded too negative towards teacher assessment practices (question seven on the original survey). Two questions were then added to determine whether the participants believe they had enough resources and training to effectively assess student achievement.
Administration of survey

After obtaining the sample of elementary schools, the researcher mailed a survey to each school on the list. A cover letter was included with each survey which explained the intent of the survey and a deadline for mailing completed surveys (see Appendix A for complete cover letter). An addressed stamped envelope was included for the return mailing. A total of 619 surveys were mailed out, and each survey was assigned a number code which corresponded to a master list kept by the researcher. As completed surveys were received by the researcher, they were marked as completed on the master list. After three weeks, a second set of surveys were mailed out to all schools which had not yet responded to the initial mailing. The cover letter was modified to strongly encourage participation in the study. Additional completed surveys were later received by the researcher and recorded on the master list.

A number of surveys from a particular school district were returned to the researcher because the elementary schools had no general music teachers and the kindergarten through fourth grade students received no general music classes. The researcher placed phone calls to each of the elementary schools in this district that had received surveys to confirm whether or not there was a general music teacher at the building. Seventy-nine of the schools from this particular district were confirmed to have no general music classes for grades kindergarten through four. Out of the remaining 540 surveys, 255 were completed and returned, giving this study a 47% return rate.
Analysis

Forty-one percent of the 619 surveys were completed and returned to the researcher. An additional 75 schools were determined to have no general music program. All data from the completed surveys were first coded for statistical analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey results. These descriptive statistics provided answers to three of the researcher’s questions, but did not provide enough information to answer the question regarding factors that affect elementary general music teachers’ ability to assess the standards. In order to examine possible differences between the general information responses and the teachers’ frequency of assessment and opinions, the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance test was performed using the computer statistics program StatView. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare teacher reported assessment techniques with teacher opinions.
RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies that are currently being used to assess the National Standards for Music Education in elementary general music classrooms as well as the factors that influence teachers’ frequency of assessment and assessment practices. The results provided the following answers to the research questions.

*Research Question One*

Research question one inquired about the types of assessment strategies elementary general music teachers are currently using to assess the National Standards for Music Education. Results indicated that overall, the most used strategy for assessing each of the nine content standards was observation, followed by concert performance and written tests. Portfolios and singing tests were the least used assessment strategies.

Table 1 shows the percent of teachers surveyed who used each type of assessment. The assessment strategies are abbreviated in the table as follows: A is audiotape, CP is concert performance, O is observation, R is rubric, P is Portfolio, ST is singing test, V is videotape, and WT stands for written test.

In summary, observation is the most commonly used assessment strategy for all nine of the national standards, followed by concert performances and written tests. Portfolios were used less than all other types of assessment strategies.
Table 1

*Assessment Strategies Used by Elementary General Music Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Standard</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>CP</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>ST</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>WT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing instruments</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and notating</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and other arts</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and history</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Two

Research question two asked how frequently elementary general music teachers assess their students on each of the national standards for music education. Singing was the most frequently assessed content standard, with 56% of the teachers assessing it frequently, and 34% assessing it occasionally. Fifty-two percent also said that they frequently assessed reading and notating music, and 45% frequently assess listening and analyzing music. The least assessed standards were composition and improvisation. Forty-four percent of the teachers indicated that they seldom assess composition, and 20% of them never assess it. Forty-two percent of the surveyed teachers said that they seldom assess improvisation and 17% indicated that they never assess it. Overall, results indicated that singing and reading and notating music are the most frequently assessed standards, while composition and improvisation are assessed least frequently.

Table two shows a complete listing of the findings for the frequency of assessment for each national standard. Results are listed as the percent of teachers who chose each response.
Table 2

*Frequency of Assessment of the National Standards for Music Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Standard</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing instruments</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and notating</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and other arts</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and history</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Three

Research question three addressed the factors that may affect elementary general music teachers’ assessment of the national standards for music education. These factors included the number of students, teaching schedule, teaching experience, and the kind of report card grades assigned.

Descriptive statistics show that most of the elementary general music teachers who responded to this survey teach between 251 and 750 students per week, with 40% teaching between 251-500 students per week, and 31% teaching between 501-750 students per week. Forty-nine percent of the teachers travel between two buildings each week. The average class size was 21 to 30 students. Ninety-three percent of the teachers indicated that their school district has a music curriculum, and 77% said that their district’s music curriculum incorporates the National Standards for Music Education. Eighty-six percent of the teachers have to assign some kind of grade for report cards. Teaching experience was evenly distributed with 25% having taught 1 to 5 years, 23% having taught 6 to 10 years, 24% having taught over 20 years, 15% having taught 16 to 20 years, and 14% having taught 11 to 15 years.

Other factors that may affect the ability of elementary general music teachers to assess the national standards include time, resources, and training. Results showed that 78% of the teachers surveyed don’t believe they have enough time to assess the National Standards for Music Education. Analysis of questions regarding resources and training provided mixed results. Forty-six percent of the teachers
agreed that they have enough resources to assess their students, but 31% disagreed. The surveyed teachers were also split in their opinions on teacher training. Thirty-seven percent agreed and 13% strongly agreed that they received adequate teacher training in assessment techniques, while 35% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed. Descriptive analysis indicates that the teachers surveyed seem to believe that time, resources, and teacher training are factors that affect their ability to assess students on the National Standards for Music Education.

Subsequent analysis of the general information questions regarding number of students, class size, and report cards with frequency of assessment and teacher opinion questions showed no significant relationships. However, the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance procedure indicated significant differences ($p < .05$) between teacher schedule (number of buildings) and the frequency of assessment for several of the national standards. Results indicated a relationship ($p = .025$) between number of buildings and the frequency of assessment for listening and analyzing music. A significant relationship ($p = .019$) was also found between number of buildings and understanding music in relation to history. Teachers who taught in only one building assessed these standards more frequently than the teachers who taught in multiple buildings. Results indicated that the number of buildings seemed to impact ($p = .024$) teacher opinions on time. Surprisingly, teachers who work in only one building more strongly believed that there is not enough time to assess the national standards than the teachers who work in multiple buildings.
The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance procedure also indicated significant differences between teacher experience and the frequency of assessment for singing \( (p = .059) \) and reading and notating music \( (p = .037) \). Teachers with 11 to 15 years experience assessed singing most frequently, followed by the teachers with over 20 years of experience. Teachers with 11 to 15 years and 16 to 20 years of experience assessed reading and notating music more frequently than the teachers in the other experience groups.

Additional analysis of data using the Mann-Whitney U test revealed significant differences between certain assessment strategies and teacher opinions on time. Data indicated that teachers who used rubrics to assess improvisation, reading and notating music, and evaluating music believed that they have enough time to assess the national standards \( (p = .0537, p = .0192, \text{and } p = .0375 \text{ respectively}) \). Teachers who used written tests to assess singing \( (p = .02) \), reading and notating music \( (p = .034) \), listening \( (p = .033) \), and music in relation to history \( (p = .033) \) also believed that there is enough time to assess the national standards. Significant differences were also found for teachers who used audiotapes to assess improvisation \( (p = .037) \) and teachers who used portfolios to assess listening \( (p = .037) \); these teachers also believed that there is enough time to assess the national standards in the elementary general music classrooms. Analysis revealed no other significant differences between teacher opinions on time and the remaining assessment strategies.

The Mann-Whitney U test also revealed that the teachers who do not use rubrics to assess improvisation and composition believed that participation and effort
are the most important factors to consider when assigning student grades ($p = .001$ and $p = .012$ respectively). The teachers who do not use singing tests to assess singing also believed participation and effort to be the most important factors to consider in student grades ($p = .006$), as well as the teachers who do not use written tests to assess reading and notating music ($p = .002$). Results did not indicate any further significant differences relating to teacher opinions on student participation and effort.

Further analysis of data using the Mann-Whitney U test revealed one significant finding between teacher opinions on resources and the different assessment strategies. Teachers who used written tests to assess reading and notating music believed that they had adequate resources to assess the national standards ($p = .038$).

Lastly, there were many significant findings regarding teacher opinions on adequate training in assessment techniques and the assessment strategies used by those teachers. Teachers who used the following assessment strategies believed they received adequate training in assessment techniques: rubrics to assess improvisation ($p = .044$); rubrics to assess evaluating music ($p = .007$); concert performance to assess evaluating music ($p = .01$), music in relation to other arts ($p = .025$), and music in relation to history ($p = .025$); audiotapes to assess music in relation to other arts and music in relation to history ($p = .05$); videotapes to assess listening and analyzing music ($p = .05$); and lastly, observation to assess composition ($p = .041$). It seems that teachers who feel they received adequate training in assessment are more likely to use types of assessment such as rubrics,
concert performance, audiotapes, and videotapes to assess certain national standards than those who feel they did not receive adequate training.

**Research Question Four**

Research question four inquired about the attitudes of elementary general music teachers towards assessment of the National Standards for Music Education. Results indicated that 97% of the teachers are familiar to some degree with the national standards. Fifty-one percent of the teachers strongly agreed that they were familiar with the National Standards for Music Education, and 46% agreed. Ninety-eight percent also strongly agreed or agreed that it is important to include the National Standards for Music Education as objectives in the elementary general music classroom. Interestingly, only 82% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to assess these standards in the elementary general music classroom.

One survey question stated that student participation and effort were the most important factors to consider when assigning report card grades for elementary general music. Seventy-four percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, while 4% did not respond to this statement. Fifty-one percent also agreed that a student should receive a good grade in general music if they try hard but perform poorly on music objectives. Twenty-seven percent disagreed with this statement, and 9% did not respond.

Seventy-nine percent of the teachers agreed and strongly agreed that they could provide documentation to support a student’s grade in general music class.
Seventeen percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that they could provide documentation to support a student's grade, and 4% did not respond to the question.

Responses indicated that the elementary general music teachers surveyed believe it is important to teach and assess the national standards for music education and could provide documentation to support the report card grades they assign. However, many elementary general music teachers also believe that student effort and participation are important things to consider when assigning report card grades.

In conclusion, the surveyed teachers used observation most frequently to assess all nine of the national standards. Portfolios were the least used type of assessment for the national standards. Singing was the most frequently assessed standard, while improvisation and composition were the least frequently assessed standards. Results also implied a relationship between the frequency and types of assessment used in the elementary general music classroom and factors such as teacher experience, teacher schedule (number of buildings), time, resources, teacher training, and teacher opinions about grading.
DISCUSSION

The current study provided information about elementary general music teachers’ frequency of assessment for each of the National Standards for Music Education. Standard one (singing) and standard five (reading and notating music) were assessed most frequently by the surveyed teachers, while standards four (composition) and three (improvisation) were assessed least frequently. This is not surprising because singing and reading music are two of the basic skills that provide the foundation of music education and are probably high priorities for most music teachers. This supports Byo’s findings that music teachers were most comfortable teaching the standards on singing and playing instruments, and moderately comfortable with the standards on reading and notating, and listening and analyzing. It is reasonable to assume that if teachers are more comfortable teaching certain standards they would be more comfortable assessing those standards as well. Byo also concluded that improvisation and composition were not emphasized in most elementary music classrooms. The current study supports this conclusion by showing that composing and improvising were the least frequently assessed standards. Apparently, elementary music teachers would not spend time assessing a standard that they do not spend time teaching. Lack of teaching time may limit the amount of time spent on each standard, in which case each teacher has to prioritize what they teach and assess. It seems that teachers choose to assess those areas that they believe are fundamental skills or that they are most comfortable with.

The current study also provided information on the types of assessment strategies elementary general music teachers use to assess the national standards.
Observation was the most used assessment strategy across all nine content standards, probably because it is quick and is used naturally during every music class. Observation is considered to be an important part of classroom assessment, but it must be systematic and documented to be credible (Hart, 1994). The results of this study showed that observation was the most commonly used assessment strategy, but they did not provide any details about the teachers’ documentation process in regards to observation. Informal observation without documentation can be valuable for day to day teaching and lesson planning, but should not be the only assessment strategy used for assigning student grades. Further research is needed to investigate how much of the observation in the elementary general music classroom is informal and how much is systematic and documented.

Other types of assessment were used to assess specific standards. Concert performances were used to assess singing by 66% of the teachers, while 47% used concert performances to assess playing instruments. Singing tests were also used by 49% of the teachers to assess singing, while written tests were used by 65% of the teachers to assess reading and notating music. Certain types of assessments are more appropriate for some standards than others. Obviously, written tests would not be the most effective way to assess student achievement in singing. It appears that teachers choose to use the assessment strategies that are most appropriate for the standard being assessed.

One of the least commonly used assessment strategies across all of the National Standards for Music Education was portfolios. Despite Brummett’s (1993) conclusion that the use of a processfolio (portfolio to document student work over
time) was a manageable assessment strategy for the elementary music teachers involved in her study, portfolios don’t appear to be a widely used tool for assessment in elementary general music. Portfolios are more time consuming than other types of assessment, which might explain why they are one of the least used assessment strategies in elementary general music classrooms. In addition, elementary general music teachers are often responsible for hundreds of students; finding adequate materials and storage space for hundreds of portfolios might be a problem for some teachers.

Factors that may affect elementary general music teachers’ ability to assess the national standards include time, resources, teacher schedule (number of buildings), and teacher training. Student contact time plays a large role in a teachers’ ability to provide effective assessments. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that there was not enough time to assess student achievement of the national standards. Additionally, analysis revealed that teachers who used rubrics and written tests to assess certain standards believed that they have enough time to assess the national standards. It follows that teachers who do not believe they have enough time to assess the national standards may not take the time to design rubrics and written tests for assessment. Lack of time may also explain why observation was the most commonly used assessment strategy, since observation can be less time consuming than many other types of assessment. Music teachers may be able to include a larger variety of assessment strategies in their classroom if their schedule includes adequate planning time and student contact time.
Resources also play an important role in a teachers’ ability to effectively assess student achievement. Forty percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that they did not have the resources to assess student achievement. Unfortunately, the survey did not define what those resources were so it is not clear what the surveyed teachers believe they need to effectively assess their students. Important resources might include: student music books, octavos, or reproducible music; music teacher resource books; an acoustic piano; CD recordings of a variety of musical examples; a sound system to play CDs; a variety of rhythm instruments; Orff instruments; paper and access to a photocopy machine; a TV; a VCR or DVD player; an audio recording device; a video camera; and a computer. Access to these resources would make it easier for elementary general music teachers to use a variety of assessment strategies.

Teacher schedule, specifically the number of buildings in which a teacher may teach, was related to the frequency of assessment for several standards. Teachers who taught in only one building assessed standards six and nine (listening and analyzing music, and music in relation to history) more frequently than the teachers who worked in multiple buildings. Teaching and assessing these particular standards requires a number of materials including a variety of written and recorded musical examples. Perhaps the teachers who stay in one building are able to better prepare lessons and evaluations to cover these standards. Traveling teachers often carry materials from school to school and may not always have the necessary supplies with them. Given these difficulties, how can elementary general music teachers find the time to effectively assess students on the national standards?
Perhaps the elementary music schedule needs to be changed to allow teachers enough time to plan and deliver meaningful lessons as well as assess student achievement. Music educators need to make school administrators aware of these difficulties and work with their school district to develop appropriate schedules for music programs. Future investigations could examine music teacher schedules to determine how much planning time and student contact time is needed in order to adequately teach and assess the national standards.

Half of the teachers surveyed believed they did not receive adequate training in assessment techniques. This supports Kotora’s findings that 66% of the high school choral teachers surveyed believed their undergraduate courses did not sufficiently prepare them in the area of assessment. Additional results showed that teachers who used rubrics to assess standards three and six (improvising, and listening and analyzing music) believed they received adequate training in assessment techniques. Teachers who used concert performance to assess certain standards, as well as those who used audiotapes and videotapes for certain standards, also believed they received adequate training in assessment techniques. Conversely, it follows that teachers who are not using these strategies do not believe they received adequate training. Obviously, teachers would not use strategies with which they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Perhaps music teacher education programs should expand teacher preparation in the area of assessment. Teacher training programs should include more coursework on assessment to ensure that all music educators are comfortable and knowledgeable in this area. A variety of assessment strategies should be taught along with specific ways to use assessment
strategies in music classrooms. It would also be interesting to know to what degree teachers need to understand and be fluent in various assessment strategies in order to be able to incorporate them in the classroom. Future research in this area could help music teacher training programs prepare all music teachers to be able to assess the national standards in their classrooms.

Results of the teacher opinion questions indicated that elementary general music teachers were familiar with the National Standards for Music Education and believed it important to include them as objectives in the music classroom. Most of the participants also believed that it is important to assess student achievement of the national standards. Yet a clear majority of the teachers surveyed believed that student effort and participation were the most important factors to consider for report card grades. Furthermore, over half of the teachers surveyed believed that if a student tries hard he/she should still receive a good grade in music despite poor performance on the music objectives. These results are consistent with the findings of McClung (1996), who concluded that the high school choral music teachers surveyed strongly supported considering student participation and attitude in grading. Shih (1997) also found that fifth grade general music teachers in central Texas considered effort to be more important than talent when assigning grades. Twelve years after the implementation of the National Standards for Music Education, it is interesting and disheartening to discover that many elementary general music teachers consider participation and effort to be the most important factors in assigning student grades.
In addition, teachers who did not use singing tests to assess singing or written tests to assess reading and notating music believed that participation and effort are the most important things to consider in assigning student grades. Perhaps teachers who use these strategies believe that grades should represent actual student achievement and not just effort. The National Standards for Music Education provide a framework for the teaching of important music objectives and lay the groundwork for assessing student achievement. If music is going to be considered a core academic subject, music educators need to provide evidence of student growth. This can be done by documenting student achievement of objectives using checklists, seating charts, record books, or other methods. Without this documentation, it can appear as if music education is not important or that real learning does not take place in the music classroom. It might be helpful to further investigate the reasons why effort is considered an important factor in assigning grades in music but not in other subject areas. If effort is truly the most important factor in elementary general music, why do music educators assign grades at all? Future research could attempt to clarify this contradiction and investigate the role of effort versus student achievement in assigning music grades.

This study provides an important look at assessment of the National Standards for Music Education in the elementary general music classroom. Unfortunately, not all standards are assessed equally; in fact, improvisation and composition are seldom assessed at all. Observation is the most commonly used type of assessment, while more formal assessments such as portfolios are rarely used. Music teachers also seem to have conflicting opinions on the importance of
measuring and grading student achievement. Most of the teachers surveyed believed that assessment of the national standards is important, but a majority also indicated that participation and effort are more important when determining student grades. In addition, factors such as time, resources, teacher schedule (number of buildings), and teacher training may play a role in the frequency of assessment and the types of assessments chosen by the music teacher. These topics will remain important as music educators strive to improve assessment of student achievement in their classrooms and will need to be explored further in order to better understand the role of assessment in music education.
Dear music educator,

I am an elementary music educator and a graduate student at Wayne State University. I am conducting a study of the opinions and assessment practices of elementary general music educators in Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties as part of my Masters program in music education.

In order to obtain accurate information for the study, it is important to collect data from as many music educators as possible. Your school address was chosen from the 2005 Michigan Education Directory. I’m asking you to participate in this study by completing the enclosed survey. Your responses to the questions in this survey will be completely confidential. Your name or school will not be identified in this study.

The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Please respond to the questions on each page and mail the completed survey in the postage paid envelope provided by June 17, 2005 or as soon as possible.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Return of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate. I may be reached at (586) 772-2303 if you have any questions regarding this research study. Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
Maria Barkley
Dear music educator,

I am an elementary music educator and a graduate student at Wayne State University. I am conducting a study of the opinions and assessment practices of elementary general music educators in Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties as part of my Masters program in music education.

Several weeks ago I mailed a letter and survey to your school but did not receive a response. If your completed survey has already been mailed, please disregard this second mailing. If you did not receive the first survey or misplaced it, this is your chance to participate by completing the one enclosed. In order to obtain accurate information for the study, it is important to collect data from as many music educators as possible. Your responses to the questions in this survey will be completely confidential. Your name or school will not be identified in this study.

The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Please respond to the questions on each page and mail the completed survey in the postage paid envelope provided by June 17, 2005.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Return of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate. I may be reached at (586) 772-2303 if you have any questions regarding this research study. Thank you in advance for your time and participation during this busy time of year.

Sincerely,

Maria Barkley
GENERAL INFORMATION

Directions: Please mark an X in the box in front of your answers for each of the following questions. These questions will be used to determine general information about your school district and current teaching position. All information gathered in this survey is confidential.

If you do not teach general music in grades K-4, please mark an X in this box and return the incomplete survey in the envelope provided.

1. How many students do you teach per week?
   - □ under 100
   - □ 101-250
   - □ 251-500
   - □ 501-750
   - □ 751-1000
   - □ over 1000

2. What is the average number of students in your K-4 elementary general music classes?
   - □ under 10
   - □ 11-20
   - □ 21-30
   - □ 31-40
   - □ over 40

3. How many buildings do you teach in per week?
   - □ 1
   - □ 2
   - □ 3
   - □ 4
   - □ 5 or more

4. Does your school district have a music curriculum?
   - □ no
   - □ yes
   - □ don’t know

5. Does your district’s curriculum incorporate the National Standards?
   - □ no
   - □ some, but not all
   - □ yes
   - □ don’t know

6. Please mark an “X” next to the kind of report card grades that you assign for your K-4 general music classes.
   - □ Letter grades (example: A, B, C, D)
   - □ Numeric rating scale (example: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5)
   - □ Descriptive rating scale (example: Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement)
   - □ Plus, Check, or Minus
   - □ No report card grades for general music

7. How many years have you taught elementary general music?
   - □ 1-5 years
   - □ 6-10 years
   - □ 11-15 years
   - □ 16-20 years
   - □ over 20 years
FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENT

Directions: Please mark an “X” in the box before the term that indicates how often you assess each of the National Standards for Music in your K-4 general music classes.

If you never assess the standard, mark “Never.”
If you assess the standard several times a year, mark “Seldom.”
If you assess the standard several times a marking period, mark “Occasionally.”
If you assess the standard monthly, mark “Frequently.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Standards</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music</td>
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<td>2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.</td>
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<td>3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.</td>
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<td>4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.</td>
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<td>5. Reading and notating music.</td>
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<td>7. Evaluating music and music performances.</td>
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<td>8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.</td>
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</table>
ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Directions: Please mark an “X” next to each National Standard to indicate which assessment strategies you use to assess the standard in your K-4 general music classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATIONAL STANDARDS</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>CP</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>ST</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>WT</th>
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<td>2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.</td>
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</table>

A = Audiotape - audio recordings of individual student performances are used for assessment
CP = Concert Performance – students are assessed based on their performance in a concert
O = Observation – individual or group performances in the classroom are observed for assessment purposes
R = Rubrics – rubrics are presented to students to outline expectations and grading criteria
P = Portfolios – examples of students’ work are kept for the purpose of assessing student growth over time
ST = Singing Tests – students sing alone or in small groups while the teacher assesses their performance
V = Videotape recordings – video recordings of individual or group performances are used for assessment
WT = Written tests – students complete written tests to assess their knowledge of the content area
# TEACHER OPINIONS

Directions: The following questions are statements to which I seek your agreement or disagreement.

If you “Strongly Disagree” with any statement, mark the box next to the “SD.”
If you “Disagree,” but not strongly, with any statement, mark the box next to the “D.”
If you “Agree,” but not strongly, mark the box next to the “A.”
If you “Strongly Agree” with any statement, mark the box next to the “SA.”

There are no right or wrong answers for these questions. I am only interested in how you feel about the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am familiar with the National Standards for Music Education.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>It is important to include the National Standards for Music Education as objectives in the general music classroom.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>In the elementary general music classroom, it is important to assess students on the National Standards for Music Education.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>There is enough time to assess my K-4 general music students on the National Standards.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>If I assign report card grades for elementary general music classes, I think student participation and effort are the most important factors to consider.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Parent expectations and demands are high in my school district.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>I have the resources to assess the students in my elementary general music classes.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>If a student tries hard but performs poorly on music objectives, he/she should still receive a good grade in general music.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>I received adequate training in assessment techniques to be used in the elementary general music classroom.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>If a parent questioned a student’s grade in my elementary general music class, I could provide documentation to support the grade.</td>
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Appendix B

April 1, 2004

Dear Elementary General Music Teacher,

My name is Maria Barkley and I am a graduate student at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. I would like to invite you to participate in a survey that I am conducting on assessment in the elementary general music classroom. This survey may be used as a pilot study for future research.

Please take the time to fill out this survey. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Remember that your name and school district will remain confidential. Your experiences and opinions are very important and I hope that you will contribute to this study.

Because of the time restraints of my graduate class, please return the completed survey by April 22 if possible. You may mail the survey in the addressed stamped envelope that is provided.

Thank you for your time and information.

Sincerely,

Maria Barkley
GENERAL INFORMATION

Directions: Please mark an X in the box in front of your answers for each of the following questions. These questions will be used to determine general information about your school district and current teaching position.

1. How many students do you teach per week?
   - [ ] under 100
   - [ ] 100-250
   - [ ] 251-500
   - [ ] 501-750
   - [ ] 751-1000
   - [ ] over 1000

2. What is the average number of students in your elementary general music classes?
   - [ ] under 10
   - [ ] 11-20
   - [ ] 21-30
   - [ ] 31-40
   - [ ] over 40

3. How many buildings do you teach in per week?
   - [ ] 1
   - [ ] 2
   - [ ] 3
   - [ ] 4
   - [ ] 5 or more

4. Does your school district have a music curriculum?
   - [ ] no
   - [ ] yes
   - [ ] don’t know

5. Does your district’s curriculum incorporate the National Standards?
   - [ ] no
   - [ ] some, but not all
   - [ ] yes

6. Please mark an “X” next to the kind of report card grades that you assign for your general music classes.
   - [ ] Letter grades (example: A, B, C, D)
   - [ ] Four step rating scale (examples: 1,2,3,4, or Needs Improvement, Satisfactory, Good, Excellent)
   - [ ] Three step rating scale (examples: Minus, Check, Plus, or Beginning, Developing, Competent)
   - [ ] No report card grades for general music

7. How long have you been teaching elementary general music?
   - [ ] under 5 years
   - [ ] 5-10 years
   - [ ] 10-15 years
   - [ ] 15-20 years
   - [ ] over 20 years
FREQUENCY OF ASSESSMENT

Directions: Please mark an “X” in the box before the term that indicates how often you use the following methods to assess students in your elementary general music classroom. If you never use the method to assess students, mark “never.” If you seldom use the method, mark “seldom.” If you occasionally use the method to assess students, mark “occasionally.” If you frequently use the method to assess students, mark “frequently.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Audiotapes</td>
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<td>2. Concert Performance</td>
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<td>3. Observation</td>
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<td>4. Rubrics/Rating Scales</td>
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<td>5. Student Portfolios</td>
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<td>6. Singing Tests</td>
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<td>7. Videotapes</td>
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<td>8. Written Tests</td>
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ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES


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TEACHER OPINIONS

Directions: The following questions are statements to which we seek your agreement or disagreement. If you “Strongly Disagree” with any statement, mark the box next to the “SD.” If you “Disagree,” but not strongly, with any statement, mark the box next to the “D.” If you Agree, but not strongly, mark the box next to the “A.” If you “Strongly Agree” with any statement, mark the box next to the “SA.”

There are no right or wrong answers for these questions. We are interested only in how you feel about the following statements.

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<td>It is important to include the National Standards for Music Education as objectives in the general music classroom.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>I include the National Standards for Music Education as objectives in my general music classes.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>In the elementary general music classroom, student should be assessed on the National Standards for Music Education.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>There is enough time to assess my general music students on the National Standards.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>If I have to assign report card grades for elementary general music classes, I think student participation and effort are the most important factors to consider.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>If I did not have to assign report card grades, I would not assess the students in my elementary general music classes.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Parent expectations and demands are high in my school district.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>If a student tries hard but performs poorly on class objectives, they should still receive a good grade.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>If a parent questioned a student’s grade in my elementary general music class, I could provide documentation to support the grade.</td>
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REFERENCES


ABSTRACT

ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION: A STUDY OF ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC TEACHER ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

by

MARIA BARKLEY

August 2006

Advisor: Dr. Abigail Butler

Major: Music

Degree: Master of Music

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies that elementary general music teachers use to assess the National Standards for Music Education as well as factors that influence teachers’ frequency of assessment and assessment practices. Surveys were sent to 619 elementary schools in Michigan with a forty-one percent return rate. Observation was the most used type of assessment and portfolios were used least. Standards one and five were assessed most frequently, while standards four and three were assessed the least. A majority of teachers agreed that it is important to teach and assess students on the standards; however, many also believed that participation and effort are the most important factors to consider when assigning student grades. Teacher opinions on time, their own training in assessment, and the role of effort in assigning grades were found to have significant relationships with certain assessment strategies and standards.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

MARIA BARKLEY

Maria Barkley is an elementary general music teacher. In addition to teaching kindergarten through fifth grade general music classes for the Grosse Pointe Public Schools, she also conducts handbell, children, and youth choirs at Grosse Pointe Woods Presbyterian Church. Maria received her Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education from Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. She is currently working to fulfill the requirements of a Master of Music degree at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Besides music, Maria also enjoys doing volunteer community service work and relaxing at home with her husband and three cats.