

Use of Pull-Out Lesson in Band Programs: A Survey Project

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Pull-out lesson programs are a long-standing practice of band programs at the elementary, junior high/middle school, and high school level. Given the difference in settings and contexts, the structure, frequency, and scope of pull-out lessons in band programs vary from district to district. Still, the commonalities that exist may be helpful to directors as they analyze and reflect on the best way to help their students grow musically. Due to changes and shifts in education (e.g., including emphasis on testing, changes in policy, and the impact of Covid-19), some directors may face questions the pull-out lesson program offered to students during the school day. The purpose of this article is to provide band directors with information, statistical data, and informed perspective about pull-out lesson programs and their value to bands at the elementary, junior high/middle school, and high school levels.

Prior Research on Pull-out Lessons

Pull-out lessons are held by many band directors as an essential part building a band program. Band directors can connect with students on a more personal level in lesson situations. Over 500 children ages 9 to 12 participated in a study about their satisfaction with music lessons (Rife, N et. al, 2001). In addition to other factors such as the rigor of the lesson or encouragement of friends and parents, the interactions between students and their music teacher were favorable and in part provided positive reinforcement for students to continue practicing.

Research by Degé, Kubicek, and Schwarzer discovered that at least part of the association between music lessons and intelligence is linked to the positive influence music lessons have on executive functions (e.g., the ability to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully). Executive functions in turn improve performance on intelligence tests. Their results were consistent with the idea that music training enhances executive functions like inhibition control and the ability to fluidly switch between tasks (Degé, et. al, 2011).

The review of literature by Hash (2004) revealed several trends as it relates to pull-out lessons. Research at the time indicated that 63.5% of school districts provided a pull-out lesson component as part of the band program. Of that percentage, 68.6% of those lessons involved pulling students from other academic classes. Data indicated this practice was prominent in school districts situated in the Northeast, common in the Midwest and West regions of the country, but less prevalent in the South.

At the time when Hash completed his literature review on pull-out lessons, research indicated that some tension existed between classroom educators, administrators, and instrumental music educators. The research indicated that pull-out programs might cause anxiety and frustration in students over missed work in the classroom. Additional research suggested parents might have apprehension about their child being removed from another academic class for lessons and might be a factor in their decision to support their child enrolling in instrumental music (Hash, 2004, pp. 2-3).

Kvet (1985) reported that no significant difference existed between students who participated in pull-out lessons and those who did not based upon sixth-grade reading, language, and mathematics achievement. At the time, this finding provided reassurance to all parties involved but this area has not been examined since. Thomas' study of a single school district confirmed findings in prior research on students who participate in pull-out lessons and their overall academic achievement (2019). Different from many previous studies, Thomas also examined students based upon SES and students with disabilities. The one caveat of note for current instrumental music educators is that fifth-grade students with a learning disability were at a disadvantage on a standardized mathematics test when compared to their non-

instrumental music counterparts. However, Thomas did note there was no difference in the standardized test score in mathematics or reading for sixth grade students identified as learning disabled.

Survey Description

In an effort to extend the discussion and understanding regarding pull-out lessons, a survey was created to collect information on this practice in instrumental music education. Participants were invited to participate via an open invitation posted to four different band director groups on the social media platform Facebook. Participation was strictly voluntary. The survey was open for two weeks and information was collected through a Google Form. Data was coded and analyzed with appropriate statistical tests. Participants were offered the opportunity to contribute additional information through some open-ended questions. These participants were given one week to respond to the open-ended questions.

Results of the data analysis did not produce many findings of statistical significance. It is important that all readers take the information that is shared at face value, but that generalizations and inferences may not be appropriate in all school settings. The information that follows is presented as descriptive statistics for the benefit of band directors who would like to gain a better sense of the use of pull-out lessons with their band program.

Overview of the Participants

In total, 104 band directors responded to the survey regarding pull-out lessons. Directors from twenty different states responded to the survey and the majority were from Pennsylvania (58%). Only four other states had five or more respondents including Illinois (n=6), New Jersey (n=5), New York (n=5), and Ohio (n=5). Based upon the research completed by Hash (2004), the participants by region of the country was relatively stable. When asked about teaching contexts, 37 (36%) directors indicated teaching in a rural setting, 53 (51%) indicated teaching in a suburban setting (51%), and 13 (13%) directors indicated teaching in an urban setting.

Only three directors taught in a single grade. Twenty-one directors taught two grade levels, the majority which would be considered elementary (Grades 4-5 or Grades 5-6). Seventeen directors taught three grade levels, of which most were teaching either middle school (Grades 6-8) or elementary (Grades 4-6). The remaining 62 directors taught four or more grade levels, with most of those directors (46) teaching high school (Grades 9-12). Twenty-seven of the respondent directors taught 6 or more grade levels (26%).

Of the survey respondents, 91 directors (88%) were able to offer pull-out lessons to their students. On average, this group of directors were able to offer 26 lessons per year to their students with each lesson averaging 28 minutes. When it came to organizing lesson groups, 65% of directors organized groups by instrument and grade level.

Within this group of directors, Method Book Exercises/Etudes were the most important focus of lessons (33%). Three other aspects were closely grouped together as being considered the most important focus of lessons including Large Ensemble Repertoire (24%), reaching Curricular Goals (22%), and Instrument Specific Knowledge (20%). When asked if lessons were graded, 65% of directors affirmed that it counted towards the students' grade in band. Within this group, lessons accounted for 36% of the students' total grade in band.

Survey participants were asked to rank their level of agreement with three statements regarding pull-out lessons (ranging from 5 – *strongly agree* to 1 – *strongly disagree*).

Statement about Lessons	Mean	S.D.
The pull-out lesson program helps students fulfill the goals of the district's band program.	4.65	0.79
The pull-out lesson program is supported by the parents.	4.33	0.87
The pull-out lesson program is supported by my school administration.	4.01	1.22

In addition to the aggregate data on all participants, several different sub-groups were analyzed. Data from directors in rural settings, suburban settings, urban settings, directors teaching in Pennsylvania and outside of Pennsylvania have been analyzed and reported.

Overview of Directors Providing Pull-out Lessons in Rural Settings

Thirty-five of thirty-seven directors who taught in rural settings were able to provide lessons to their students. Within the group that offered lessons, 69% of the directors were teaching across at least two levels, and 40% of directors were teaching across three levels (elementary, junior high/middle, and high school). Within this sub-group, there was a slight tendency that directors who taught more grade levels to use method book exercises and etudes as part of their lessons. Sixteen directors taught seven or more grade levels. It was interesting to observe that seven of these directors selected method Instrument Specific Knowledge as the most important focus of their lessons.

In this sub-group, 26 directors took the students' instrument into consideration for assigning lesson groups. Nine directors (26%) selected instrument specific knowledge as the most important lesson focus of the lessons. A positive correlation between how students were assigned into lesson groups and the focus on instrument specific knowledge was discovered (0.305, $\alpha = 0.01$ level). However, a correlation coefficient found to be between 0.00 and 0.30 has generally been considered to have little if any statistical relationship (Hinkle, Wiersma, Jurs, 2003).

When it came to grading, 65% of directors in the rural setting group included lessons in their students' band grade. Reaching curricular goals ($n=8$) and instrument specific knowledge ($n=8$) were the top two focus areas identified by directors who included lessons in their students' grade. Lessons accounted for 35% of the grade for students in rural band programs.

Overview of Directors Providing Pull-out Lessons in Suburban Settings

Fifty-three directors taught in suburban contexts, and 46 of those directors were able to offer lesson to their students. In the suburban sub-group, 26 of the directors (56%) reported working in Pennsylvania. Thirty-three of the directors in this sub-group (71%) were teaching between 2 and 4 grade levels with majority teaching what would be considered middle school grade levels (6,7, & 8th grades). Method Book Exercises/Etudes were the most popular lesson focus among directors in the suburban group.

Compared to colleagues teaching in rural settings, this sub-group of 46 directors on average had five minutes longer for lessons with their students. A low positive correlation was discovered between the length of the lesson and the most important lesson focus (0.276, $\alpha = 0.01$ level). In this instance, additional time in lessons may have afforded these directors opportunity to address the Large Ensemble Repertoire or Instrument Specific Knowledge (although these two aspects were ranked behind Method Book Exercises/ Etudes as the most important aspect of lessons).

Nineteen directors in the suburban group selected Method Book Exercises/Etudes as the most important focus of lessons. Eleven directors selected Large Ensemble Repertoire, 8 directors selected Curricular Goals, and 8 directors selected instrument specific knowledge. Students were sorted for lessons by grade and instrument (73%). Thirty-two directors in this sub-group (70%) included lessons as part of the

students grade in band. Directors who focused on instrument specific knowledge assigned lessons a lower percentage of the band grade than directors who focused on method book exercises and large ensemble repertoire.

Overview of Directors Providing Pull-out Lessons in Suburban Settings

Readers should exercise caution when examining the data from directors teaching in urban contexts. As there were only eleven directors in this group, these observations must be minimized to this group. Inferences and generalizations that are drawn to other populations of directors who teach in an urban context is strongly cautioned.

Of the eleven directors who reported teaching in urban contexts, six were from Pennsylvania and the other five from five different states. Seven directors in this group had elementary teaching responsibilities, and six instructed jr. high/middle school. Eight directors in this group taught four grade levels or fewer. All eleven directors in urban contexts were able to offer lessons to their students. On average, this group of directors in urban contexts offered their students 38 lessons per year, averaging 33 minutes per lesson. Eight of the eleven directors in urban contexts sorted their students into lesson groups based upon their instrument. Method Book Exercises/Etudes (6) were the most important focus area in lessons, followed by Curricular Goals (3), and Large Ensemble Repertoire (2). Only three directors in this group included lessons as part of the students' grade in band.

Comparison of Directors among Rural, Suburban, and Urban Teaching Contexts

	No. of Directors	Directors able to offer lessons	Avg. Lessons per year	Avg. Length (min).	Directors who grade lessons	Percentage of Band Grade	Most important area of focus in lessons
Rural	37	94.59%	26	27	65%	35%	Curricular Goals and Inst. Specific Knowledge
Suburban	53	84.91%	25	29	70%	28%	Method Book Exercises
Urban	13	84.62%	38	30	23%	20%	Method Book Exercises

Comparison of Response Ratings among Directors in Rural, Suburban, and Urban Contexts

	Rural		Suburban		Urban	
Statement about Lessons	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1. The pull-out lesson program helps students fulfill the goals of the district's band program.	4.60	0.68	4.85	0.42	4.64	0.81
2. The pull-out lesson program is supported by the parents.	4.40	0.76	4.42	0.81	4.27	0.79
3. The pull-out lesson program is supported by my school administration.	4.20	1.00	4.13	1.17	4.00	0.77

An independent t-test was conducted to test whether the means were significantly different between the means of the rural and suburban groups. Statistically, there were no significant differences. The urban group was not included in the t-test due to the low number of participants.

Comparison of PA Directors and Non-Pennsylvania Directors

Pennsylvania Directors

Among directors teaching in Pennsylvania, 56 of 60 (93.3%) were able to provide lessons to their students. While 31% of the directors in this sub-group taught exclusively in elementary levels, it was interesting to note that 27% were teaching across elementary, jr. high/middle, and high school levels. Regardless of assigned teaching level, the Pennsylvania director group averaged teaching almost 5 different grade levels (4.8). On average, students of Pennsylvania directors received 29 lessons per year with each lesson lasting 30 minutes. Many directors (67%) sorted students into lesson groups based upon their grade and instrument. Thirty-two directors (58%) in the Pennsylvania group included lessons as part of their students' grade in band, worth 42% of the grade.

Non-Pennsylvania Directors

Of the directors teaching outside of Pennsylvania, 36 of 43 directors in this sub-group were able to provide lessons for their students. Twenty directors taught in suburban settings, 11 in rural settings, and 5 in urban settings. Over half the directors taught at the elementary and middle school level, while only 25% were involved in teaching at the high school level. 72% of directors in this sub-group assigned students based upon their grade and instrument, and 17% of directors assigned students by ability. Method Book Exercises/Etudes (36%) were the most important lesson focus for directors, followed by Instrument Specific Knowledge (25%), Large Ensemble Repertoire (22%), and Curricular Goals (17%). In this sub-group, 72% of directors included lesson as part of their students' grade in band, comprising 29% of the student's grade.

Comparison of Directors in Pennsylvania and Outside of Pennsylvania

	No. of Directors	Directors able to offer lessons	Avg. Lessons per year	Avg. Length (min).	Directors who grade lessons	Percentage of Band Grade	Most important area of focus in lessons
PA	60	93.3%	29	30	58%	42%	Method Book Exercises
Non-PA	43	83.7%	30	31	72%	29%	Method Book Exercises

Comparison of Response Ratings among Directors in Pennsylvania and Outside of Pennsylvania

	PA		Non-PA	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Statement about Lessons				
1. The pull-out lesson program helps students fulfill the goals of the district's band program.	4.64	0.68	4.86	0.42
2. The pull-out lesson program is supported by the parents.	4.44	0.66	4.36	0.93
3. The pull-out lesson program is supported by my school administration.	3.93*	1.12	4.53	0.81
* - significant at the 0.05 level				

An independent t-test was conducted to test whether the means were significantly different between the two groups. Statistically, there were no significant differences between the means for statements 1 and 2. A statistically significant difference was discovered between the means for the third statement ($\alpha = 0.05$

level). The group of Pennsylvania directors ($M=3.93$, $S.D. = 1.12$) rated their perception of administrative support lower than the group of directors teaching outside of Pennsylvania ($M=4.53$, $S.D. = 0.81$), $t(89) = -2.965$, $p = .003$.

Open-ended responses

Thirty-nine of the participants indicated they would be willing to answer several more questions regarding pull-out lessons. In total, ten directors provided responses (26%). Ideally, a higher response rate is desirable. Despite the low response rate, their perspectives and thoughts have been summarized for each of the questions. Directors are not personally identifiable in this section. Several direct quotes from a few of the directors appear in this section alongside aggregate summation of common themes and ideas.

Question #1: How do you respond to questions about the necessity of your pull-out lesson program to administrators or teachers in other subject areas from which you draw students?

Three directors reported that lessons are mandated as part of the curriculum and necessary for a student to receive credit in band. Four other directors reported that lessons address a specialized learning modality within a single course subject (different from a math or language arts course in which everyone is developing the same skills). Two directors commented on how pull-out lessons provide an opportunity for students that they cannot access outside of the school due to the lack of private teachers in their region. A common theme among four of the directors was sharing data and research on the benefits of music education with their administration and showing evidence of collaboration with other academic teachers with the lesson program. One of the directors commented:

“We also make sure to work collaboratively with the teachers we are pulling from and have a make-up band lesson time available if students need to miss band due to a test or review in class.”

Hash (2004) indicated that some tension existed between classroom educators, administrators, and instrumental music educators. This strategy mentioned above is a good alternative for directors to consider utilizing.

Question #2: Has your pull-out lesson program changed since the start of the 2020-21 school year? (e.g., format, focus, time, grade level) Have the changes you have made (whether forced upon or elected) made a difference (positive or negative) in student progress?

Five directors reported that they made no changes to their lesson program. Two of the directors reduced the size of their lesson groups to allow students to have more time to play during lessons, while another director shifted the lesson focus to method book exercises to allow students to work on a more individualized pace. Two directors commented that while their lesson program has returned to their traditional routine, they find that the individual development of instrumental executive skills varies quite a deal from student to student.

QUESTION #3: Do you use some type of reward or incentive system to keep students motivated to work through a method book or towards a curricular goal within your lesson program?

Within the responses, four directors reported that they do not use a reward or incentive system, but rather focused on intrinsic motivation and sense of accomplishment within their students. One director shared:

“We try to demonstrate and teach them that the feeling of having done well is the reward.”

Four directors used the band belt/karate method with their students with positive results. Two directors viewed the influence of peers as a positive incentive for students within pull-out lessons. One director who had mixed age levels in the lesson groups commented on how younger students aspire to be as good as older students, while older students try to impress younger students with their abilities.

QUESTION 4: Are students involved in/given the opportunity to set goals or select content to be worked upon during lessons? Do you find it to be a successful strategy to engage them within the lesson?

Eight of ten directors reported that students are involved in some way in setting goals or selecting content for their lessons. Several common thoughts shared by this group including guiding/steering students towards certain challenges, asking students to identify areas in which they need to improve, and the positive impact that student led choices in goal setting seems to have on their engagement in lessons. In contrast, one director commented:

“I have found my students respect the goals I am giving them and rarely want to make their own, they enjoy meeting the challenges I give them.”

Discussion

In this survey, 60% of the participant directors taught across four or more grade levels. Most directors (88%) were able to offer pull-out lessons to the students involved in their band program. Overall, directors favored organizing their lesson groups by instrument and grade level and favored Method Book Exercises/Etudes for the focus of lesson time. Lessons were included as part of a students' grade in band by 65% of the directors. Furthermore, lessons accounted for 36% of a students' grade.

Despite differences in the context in which they taught, there was little difference in the frequency, length, and assessment of pull-out lessons among suburban and rural school settings. Although not statistically significant, a higher percentage of rural directors were able to provide lessons to their student. Additionally, the focus areas during lessons were Reaching Curricular Goals and Instrument Specific Knowledge. Responses in the open-ended responses from self-identified rural directors indicated pull-out lessons provide students an opportunity not accessible outside of school due to the lack of private teachers in their region.

When it came to comparing director in and outside of Pennsylvania, there were several differences worth discussing in depth. The number of lessons and the average length between these two groups were almost the same. While not statistically significant, more directors in Pennsylvania were able to provide lessons to their students. In the area of assessment and grading, there were a higher percentage of directors outside of Pennsylvania (72%) that used lessons as part of the band grade than directors in Pennsylvania (58%). In contrast, directors in Pennsylvania held lessons to be worth more of their students' grade in band (42%) than directors outside of Pennsylvania (29%).

The statistically significant difference discovered between the means for the third statement “The pull-out lesson program is supported by my school administration.” is interesting. Directors in Pennsylvania rated their perception of administrative support lower than the group of directors teaching outside of Pennsylvania. This difference could in part be explained by the number of band directors in Pennsylvania who are teaching across 7 or more grade levels. It is possible these directors travel between 2 or 3 different buildings and may be accountable to just as many administrators. Contact time and interaction with one of their administrators may be limited by their schedule and contribute in some way influence this perception. The level of support the administrator gives towards the program may actually be different than the perception rated by the director in this survey.

The open-ended responses provided by ten of the directors provides another lens to focus the conversation moving forward. Research like what was shared at the beginning of this article may be another useful tool for directors as they advocate for the sustained use of pull-out lessons in their school setting. While the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic did impact band programs in terms of recruitment and retention, some directors did not make changes to the basic structure of their lesson program. The use of rewards or an incentive system for band lessons were mixed among the directors who provided open-ended responses. In this limited sample of directors, eight of them reported involving students in the process of setting goals or selecting content for lessons.

There is still need for further research as it pertains to pull-out lessons. A replication of the studies completed by Hash (2004), Kvet (1985), and Baker (2019) for band programs in a post-Covid educational setting is certainly warranted. A consistent concern in education since the completion of the March 2020 school year is the perceived achievement gap. To the degree that this might impact students enrolled in a pull-out lesson program is not clear. It would be interesting to see more work done in the area of gauging student satisfaction with lessons and learn the degree to which band directors involve students in selecting content and setting goals in a pull-out lesson program.

For some students, pull-out lessons provide the first opportunity to acquire skills that set them on the path to become a musician. For some directors, pull-out lessons provide the opportunity to build a balanced and skilled group of musicians that contribute to a band program. As band programs move forward, it is obvious that the use of pull-out lessons will continue to be part of that process.

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