Understanding the Professional Lives and Work of Experienced Music Educators Who Teach in Multiple Music Classroom Contexts

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to represent the professional lives and work of four experienced music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts. The central question developed for this study was: How do participants describe the key elements in their professional lives and work in multiple music classroom contexts? Portraiture was the research approach, and intensity sampling was used to select participants based on the criteria of teacher experience, the diversity of their daily class schedules, and the settings in which they teach.

Data sets included individual interviews, observations, photographs, and stimulated recall episodes. Data were analyzed using In Vivo coding, an inductive method that allowed me to draw directly from participants’ language to create codes and themes. I created individual participant portraits which were further divided into the overarching themes of music teaching and learning in multiple music classroom contexts; school work; relationships; and navigating personal and professional life intersections. Trustworthiness was addressed through the following: (a) triangulation; (b) member checks; (c) researcher reflexivity; (d) peer review; and (e) audit trail.

Findings indicated that the teaching of musical concepts across multiple music classroom contexts seemed to be almost second nature for the experienced educators in this study. When discussing curriculum and planning, participants spoke very little about music content and more about the challenges of teaching different age and ability levels throughout the school day. Participant data aligns with past literature surrounding adaptive expertise, teaching outside of specialty, micropolitics, professional development, relational and social needs, and role stress.
Implications for preservice teacher education include continuing discussions about building relationships, fostering autonomy, and reaching out for help when needed. Suggestions for inservice teacher professional development and support include providing appropriate content- and context-specific opportunities for experienced educators who may need supported differently than they did earlier in their careers and providing mentoring opportunities for teachers who work in multiple music classroom contexts to balance feeling unprepared for these situations when finishing undergraduate programs that are specialized. Future research should continue to study teachers in multiple music classroom contexts with longitudinal methods, quantitative designs, and varying populations of educators.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

Educators often work in “an uncertain, complex environment” (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, p. 456) and frequently encounter situations throughout the instructional process that no amount of planning may predict, and which call for immediate and responsive decision making. In addition to the complexity of the classroom environment itself, music educators often teach multiple courses within many diverse content areas (e.g., guitar, band, choir, orchestra, general music) or different levels of students within the same subject (e.g., 6th-8th band or 9th-12th choir) during one school day (May et al., 2017). The ability to ask oneself what to do and how to do it, and subsequently navigate through moments of unpredictability within and across multiple contexts, implies utilizing a repertoire of prior understandings, skills, and knowledge in new and investigatory ways (Schön, 1987). In The Art of Teaching Music, Jorgenson (2008) highlights the use of improvisation and innovation, as a means of transforming a challenging teaching and learning situation into something more impactful.

In teaching, some things “click” and others do not. Some lessons and classes rise above the ordinary and we may not always understand the reasons. We may plan a lesson beforehand to go in one direction, and as it proceeds, it seems to take on a life of its own. Sometimes students take the lesson away in an entirely unexpected direction. When these unexpected and serendipitous events occur, we need a plan to redirect instruction or bring structure to the process. Much of the knowing how and when to respond to student interest in an unexpected direction is instinctual. Indeed, much teaching is intuitive and imaginative as the improvisation continues. It is important to trust our own experience more than we do the dictates of others about what they think we should do. (p. 204)
Therefore, to frame my thinking and present the focus of rest of the paper, I begin this chapter with a discussion of the notion of expertise and experience and adaptiveness in instruction. The chapter proceeds with how these topics appear within music education literature, the need for the study, the purpose and central research question, and a chapter summary.

**Expertise and Experience**

Two types of expertise, routine and adaptive, were first identified in scholarship by Hatano and Inagaki (1986). The authors suggested that people become experts by initially learning certain skill sets and procedural processes in routine and familiar ways, thereby finely tuning their ability to perform and execute activities without necessarily understanding them. These routine experts, then, become skilled in producing desired results effectively and efficiently through learned patterns in a given, stable environment. However, the authors further elaborated that “human beings have intrinsic motivation for understanding” (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986, p. 28) and therefore begin to form a conceptual knowledge base that allows them not only to perform tasks using their preexisting skill sets but also to make choices and think about possibilities that can apply to new and unfamiliar situations. This moves learners from knowing how to asking why, and propels them toward becoming adaptive experts, or “those who not only perform procedural skills efficiently but also understand the meaning of the skills and nature of their object” (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986, p. 28).

The authors explained that people need to be willing to experiment and take risks to develop adaptive expertise, and that these factors often depend on the variability of the task being performed as well as the context in which it occurs. If the same skills are applied to the same situations and contexts without variation, adaptive expertise may not be achieved. While efficiency may be sacrificed for the sake of trying new solutions, adaptive expertise is more
likely to occur when understanding is the focus rather than procedures and performance. Hatano and Inagaki (1986) specified that personal orientations toward efficiency or understanding may influence one’s ability to be flexible and adaptable. It should be noted that routine expertise is often satisfactory in many situations, and if a routine response is effective there may not be a need for adaptation. Therefore, the two types of expertise are seen to exist in tandem and adaptive experts often navigate through both when necessary.

According to Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), as people progress on the path toward skill acquisition, they pass through five stages: novice; advanced beginner; competence; proficiency; and expertise (see Figure 1). The authors specified, “As human beings acquire a skill through instruction and experience, they do not appear to leap suddenly from rule-guided ‘knowing that’ to experience-based know-how” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 20). This is similar to the way in which Hatano and Inagaki (1986) explained routine expertise (the ‘knowing that’) and adaptive expertise (the know-how). While Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) asserted that experts often act upon new situations in intuitive and “fluid” (p. 32) ways, they also suggested that people at this level of skill development are able to adapt to new situations due to reflection upon experience and practice. Additionally, experts will adapt using “unconscious” application of previous knowledge to new or unexpected incidents, as “an expert’s skill has become so much a part of him that he need be no more aware of it than he is of his own body” (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, p. 30)
Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993), defined expertise as “a venture beyond natural abilities” (p. 4).

Our conjecture is that in order to be experts, people must choose to address the problems of their field at the upper limit of the complexity they can handle. And they must make this choice early in their careers, or perhaps even earlier, as school children. For it is through such working at the upper edge that people develop the deep knowledge that makes expert performance possible. (p. 20)

Both novices and experts begin by working within the confines of their practical knowledge and make decisions accordingly. As they move from one phase of skill acquisition to the next, they become better able to process and connect information from previous events, which in turn leads to more efficient and seemingly effortless decision-making.

While some scholars addressed within this section have discussed expertise using the terms “routine” and “adaptive,” Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) chose a slightly different orientation toward skill acquisition: crystallized and fluid abilities.

Crystallized intelligence represents previously constructed assemblies of performance processes retrieved as a system and applied anew in instructional or other performance situations not unlike those experienced in the past, whereas fluid intelligence represents
new assemblies or the flexible reassembly, of performance processes needed for more extreme adaptations to novel situations. (p. 36)

As in previous scholarship, these authors stated that the two types of expertise are not separate from one another, but rather interact, and one may be more prominent than the other at various stages of skill development.

In summary, the above general theories of skill acquisition and expertise development suggest that when faced with new and unexpected situations, experts adapt by combining their knowledge and experience in ways that seem to be fluid and intuitive. Scholars appear to agree that routine and adaptive expertise coexist, and that adaptive experts are able to move in and out of the two types of responses when faced with unexpected or new scenarios thereby allowing them to be flexible, innovative, and even improvisatory.

Conducting research about expertise and expert teachers is challenging because “there are differences in perspectives of ‘expert’” (Bucci, 2003, p. 83). In an unpublished review of literature about teacher expertise, Hattie (2003) and a colleague identified expert teachers as those who “can identify essential representations of their subject; can guide learning through classroom interactions; can monitor learning and provide feedback; can attend to affective attributes; and, can influence student outcomes” (p. 5). Additionally, one characteristic common across many studies of teaching expertise is the ability to adapt instruction to meet students’ needs. According to Steffy et al. (2000), “Expert teachers anticipate student responses, modifying and adjusting instruction to promote growth. Teachers at this level competently support, facilitate, and nurture growth and development of all students, regardless of their backgrounds or ability levels” (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 8). Similarly, creativity, flexibility, fluidity, effortlessness, and efficiency have been cited as notable qualities of teaching expertise (Berliner, 1988; Pinsky et al., 1998; Sawyer, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2005; Shulman, 1987; Tsui, 2009).
Berliner (1986) stated that to “untangle” (p. 9) the terms “expert” and “experienced” is a difficult task within education. While some may argue that these terms should not be interchangeable, they continue to be used in related ways. Novices are often viewed as those with few years of teaching experience at the beginning phase of development and experts tend to be associated with a greater amount of time in the field, as within the *Life Cycle of Career Teachers* model (Steffy et al., 2000). Although it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact number of years of experience required to reach the “expert” phase of skill development, Berliner (2004) has suggested that five to seven years of experience is necessary.

Building on the work of Berliner, Palmer et al. (2005) reiterated that experience has been a leading factor in determining expertise for decades. In a review of 27 studies on teacher expertise, Palmer et al. (2005) found that the majority of researchers used years of experience to select “expert” participants. The range spanned from two to 20 years, with most participants falling within the five- to 10-year marker. This aligned with Berliner’s suggestion of five to seven years indicating the “expert” phase of skill development, however; Palmer et al. noted that several other indicators of expertise aside from experience were also found within the reviewed literature, complicating the ways in which “experts” are characterized and selected. Palmer et al. (2005) suggested that deliberate practice and repetition are necessary in the development of skills and knowledge associated with experts in a wide range of fields, yet expertise is often viewed as a social construct, meaning that group members “are selected as experts because others consider them to be experts” (p. 15). Sometimes, those who hold a special rank, certificate, or membership are recognized as experts by affiliates of the same social circle who do not possess those attributes (Palmer et al., 2005). Further muddying the definition of “expert,” neither the
task performance nor the number of years of experience held by those with special certificates or memberships seem to play a key role in determining their status.

**Adaptiveness in Instruction**

A report by the National Research Council (2000) listed adaptive expertise as one of the most important aspects of being a professional in the field of education. In *How People Learn* (National Research Council, 2000), researchers defined one characteristic of those who exhibit adaptive expertise as the “ability to monitor and regulate their own understanding” (p. 78), allowing them to use previous knowledge to understand and process new information or new situations. Additionally, education scholars Bransford et al. (2005) likened adaptive experts to those “who are prepared for effective lifelong learning that allows them continuously to add to their knowledge and skills” (p. 3), as all new learning involves some sort of knowledge transfer.

A recent systematic review of studies within educational science publications (Carbonell et al., 2014) further examined learning and personality characteristics of adaptive experts. Within the 21 works meeting the criteria for consideration, researchers found discussion of learner characteristics of adaptive experts in the areas of domain specific knowledge, skills (e.g., abstract reasoning, cognitive flexibility, inductive reasoning), regulation processes (e.g., goal setting, self-efficacy, achievement motivation), and past experience (Carbonell et al., 2014, p. 19). Personality factors that may influence adaptive expertise included agreeableness, conscientiousness, extroversion, emotional stability, neuroticism, openness to experience, change receptivity, and adaptive beliefs (Carbonell et al., 2014, p. 22). However, it is important to note that “the relation of personality factors on adaptive expertise remains unclear” (Carbonell et al., 2014, p. 26) as specific contexts may have varying degrees of impact upon the development of adaptive expertise.
In addressing the need for professionalization in teaching and teacher reforms, Shulman (1987) proposed a “model of pedagogical reasoning and action” (p. 15) which included the following components: comprehension; transformation; instruction; evaluation; reflection; and new comprehensions. After teachers understand what they are to teach, these ideas must then be transformed to allow for student comprehension as well. During this transformation phase the teacher adapts the information for the context in which it to be taught and for the specific students who will be receiving it. According to Shulman (1987):

Adaptation is the process of fitting the represented material to the characteristics of the students. What are the relevant aspects of student ability, gender, language, culture, motivations, or prior knowledge and skill that will affect their responses to different forms of representation and presentation? What student conceptions, misconceptions, expectations, motives, difficulties, or strategies might influence the ways. In which they approach, interpret, understand, or misunderstand the material? Related to adaptation is tailoring, which refers to the fitting of the material to the specific students in one’s classrooms rather than to students in general. When a teacher thinks through the teaching of something, the activity is a bit like the manufacture of a suit of clothing. Adaptation is like preparing a suit of a particular style, color, and size that can be hung on a rack. Once it is prepared for purchase by a particular customer, however, it must be tailored to fit perfectly. (p. 17)

Shulman implied that instruction is dependent upon comprehension and transformation, and teachers simply cannot adapt or be flexible if they do not first possess the content knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary to understand the materials being taught. Therefore, adaptiveness in instruction relies on a concrete pedagogical knowledge base which can then be applied to content- and context-specific situations.

Sawyer (2004) approached adaptiveness in instruction through the use of two metaphors. The first, teachers as performers, presents a harmful impression suggestive of the “sage on the stage” notion where teachers read from a script while their students sit in the audience as spectators. “Like scripted instruction, the performance metaphor suggests that an effective actor could be an excellent teacher even without understanding anything” (Sawyer, 2004, p. 12). To
combat this negative image, Sawyer (2004) proposed that teaching is actually improvisational, with teachers and students interacting, often in “unpredictable” (p. 13) environments that are ever-changing. Moreover, Sawyer (2004) used the term “disciplined” (p. 13) improvisation to indicate that teaching occurs within a framework based on structure and routine, but that both teacher and student work together to problem-solve.

Improvisational, or creative, teachers guide students through learning and problems that may not have been part of their original plan, indicating the use of adaptability in instruction. Sawyer proposed that creative teaching relies on a solid foundation of pedagogical content knowledge that allows for the ability to respond and make decisions based upon combining information from prior experiences.

Although an experienced teacher may have encountered most of the potential student answers in prior years, a teacher cannot know exactly which answer will be proposed on any given day. And even with years of experience, a teacher cannot predict how the rest of the class will respond to a proposed answer. (Sawyer, 2004, p. 15)

Because of the unpredictability of the classroom environment coupled with the structure necessary to facilitate effective student learning outcomes, Sawyer’s improvisation metaphor is an appropriate choice for describing adaptability and flexibility in instruction.

Schwartz et al. (2005) suggested that optimal learning occurs when instruction balances efficiency with innovation. They proposed that transfer requires “flexible adaptation of old responses to new settings” (Schwartz et al., 2005, p. 7) and that efficiency and innovation should coexist within instructional routines and processes. While efficiency implies a learned, repeated behavior that can be performed with speed and skill, innovation suggests the ability to experiment and change behaviors to meet the needs of students in particular contexts. When teaching becomes too rigid and automatic, innovation does not have room to blossom. However,
in order to be an adaptive teacher, one needs to possess a collection of knowledge, skills, and routines that will allow them to make the necessary changes to suit the situation at hand.

The balance of innovation and efficiency occurs within the Optimal Adaptability Corridor, the route one travels along on the way to becoming an adaptive expert. Novice teachers perform with low levels of innovation and efficiency, while adaptive experts perform with high levels of both (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Two Dimensions of Learning and Transfer*

![Diagram showing Innovation vs Efficiency]

*Note:* Figure obtained from Schwartz et al., 2005, p. 28.

Schwartz et al. (2005) stated:

Within their base domains, both routine experts (who at the extreme would be trained only along the efficiency dimension) and adaptive experts (whose experiences would tend to fit within the corridor) are highly efficient at solving a number of problems that have become routine for them. However, given a highly novel problem within their domain, or a problem within a new domain, only the adaptive experts can utilize their existing knowledge and practices to learn with the resources at hand. (p. 56)
The middle, or the balancing point, of the Optimal Adaptability Corridor is where routine (efficiency) meets creativity (innovation) (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Optimal Adaptability Corridor*

![Optimal Adaptability Corridor diagram](image)

*Note:* Figure obtained from Schwartz et al., 2005, p. 38.

**Music Education Studies**

In music education specifically, non-musical skills such as flexibility (Johnson & Matthews, 2017), reflection in- and upon-action (Atterbury, 1994; Butke, 2006), and informed instructional decision-making (Johnson & Matthews, 2020) have been found to contribute to effective, or expert, music teaching among experienced music educators. These non-musical skills may be considered important components of the work of teachers, and although different musical skills may be necessary for teaching within diverse music classroom contexts, music teacher educators have indicated that general teaching skills rank highest in importance when examined alongside musical skills and personality characteristics (Rohwer & Henry, 2004; Taebel, 1980). Historically, music education researchers have studied effective music teaching in
relation to systematic (Rosenshine et al., 2002) and direct (Sink, 2002) instruction. Characteristics defining effective music instruction include reviewing prior knowledge, guiding student individual and group performance, focusing on full-class instruction, providing both verbal and nonverbal feedback, and fostering musical independence (Rosenshine et al., 2002, p. 300). Additionally, Sink (2002) determined “knowledge of the subject matter is a prerequisite of effective teaching” (p. 316) and appropriate feedback and reinforcement of subject matter are important for successful student learning. Although “effective” may not always equal “expert” teaching, these and other closely related terms seem to be used similarly within education literature.

To highlight the challenges in correlating teaching longevity with expertise specifically within music education, Standley and Madsen (1991) gathered information from music educators at various career stages to determine if these two variables were independent of one another. The researchers labeled novices in this study as those who had completed the requisite coursework but who had not yet started student teaching. Experienced educators were those who had taught for one to 10 years, and expert teachers were those with 10 or more years of teaching and an additional recognition of excellence from their colleagues, such as an award (Standley & Madsen, 1991). Although many experienced teachers displayed expertise during responses to videotaped classroom scenarios, Standley and Madsen also observed much of the same expertise in teachers who had taught for far less time. Their findings indicated that length of teaching does not necessarily equal teaching expertise in music education, meaning that something other than time dedicated to practice might be an indicator of expertise in this particular field. The question of exactly what that indicator might be has yet to be fully realized.
Purpose Statement and Central Question

The purpose of this study was to represent the professional lives and work of four experienced music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts. The central question developed for this study was: How do participants describe the key elements in their professional lives and work in multiple music classroom contexts?

Need for Study

It would be rare to find a music teacher in the United States who isn’t changing music classroom contexts throughout the day, as most music teachers are licensed to teach multiple grade levels and music subjects (May et al., 2017). Moreover, even if a music educator teaches only in one building level (e.g., elementary, middle school, high school) there are often multiple grade levels and music courses within the teacher’s daily or weekly load. As Steffy et al. (2000) noted, Berliner (1986) suggested that teaching expertise may be highly dependent on context, “but it is unclear how a changing context affects the teacher’s expertise” (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 82) or the key components of their work. Steffy et al. further relayed, “Such changes in context could revolve around grade level, building, colleagues, administration, curriculum, or class population” (p. 82), suggesting that research should focus on expert educators to determine how their knowledge and skills might transfer from one situation to the next. While expertise in skills exists somewhat independent of context, it is up to the expert to then adapt those skills within various contexts. Although the focus of this paper was to understand the work of experienced music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts rather than key components of teaching expertise, as seen in the introduction of this paper, the topics seem to be intertwined. Therefore, the participants in this study were selected for both their experience and their expertise as is discussed in Chapter III.
Definitions

**Music Classroom Contexts:** For the purpose of this paper, I created the phrase “music classroom contexts” to describe the different teaching situations in which participants in this study work. Music classroom contexts may apply to various grade levels throughout the school day, mixed grade levels in one class, or types of music making (such as band, choir, orchestra, general music, etc.). I feel as though this phrase best defines participants’ teaching situations, whereas other, perhaps more familiar words, such as “multidisciplinary,” “specialty,” or “sub-discipline” do not.

**Work of Teaching:** During the early stages of this study, I drew from Ball and Forzani’s (2009) definition of “work of teaching” to frame my orientation toward this phenomenon. They stated:

> By ‘work of teaching,’ we mean the core tasks that teachers must execute to help pupils learn. These include activities carried on both inside and beyond the classroom, such as leading a discussion of solutions to a mathematics problem, probing students’ answers, reviewing material for a science test, listening to and assessing students’ oral reading, explaining an interpretation of a poem, talking with parents, evaluating students’ papers, planning, and creating and maintaining an orderly and supportive environment for learning. The work of teaching includes broad cultural competence and relational sensitivity, communication skills, and the combination of rigor and imagination fundamental to effective practice. (p. 497)

Upon further reflection, I decided to leave the interpretation of “work of teaching” open to participants to avoid leading them toward a specific answer. My own thoughts about the definition of “work of teaching,” and how I personally saw it as I interviewed participants, included any and all aspects of the job which may range from administrative duties like copying papers and taking attendance to the processes of planning, instruction, and reflection.
Methodology Overview

I chose portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as the research approach and used intensity sampling (Patton, 2015) to select four participants based on the criteria of teacher experience, the diversity of their daily class schedules, and the settings in which they teach. Data sets included individual interviews, observations, photographs, and stimulated recall episodes. Data were analyzed using In Vivo coding, an inductive method that allowed me to draw directly from participants’ language to create codes and themes. I then created individual participant portraits and looked across each to find the overarching themes of music teaching and learning in multiple music classroom contexts; school work; relationships; and navigating personal and professional life intersections.

Chapter I Summary

Chapter I presented introductory material, the purpose statement and central research question, and a methodology overview. Chapter II will review literature in both general and music education used to inform my research.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

When I began conducting research for this study, I was drawn to the notion of adaptive expertise as I considered how experienced educators working in multiple music classrooms may change their pedagogical practices when teaching different age levels and subject matter. The literature helped me understand how teachers use in-the-moment adaptations and provided me with examples of how adaptation within the classroom differs between preservice, beginning, and experienced educators. Although the studies in this section are not always about music educators and do not provide instances of teachers working in multiple classroom contexts, some of the findings provide suggestions for teacher education practices that align with my findings in Chapter V. The following categories will be discussed: a) Teacher Adaptive Expertise; b) Teacher Thought and Action; c) Teacher Decision Making; d) Teacher Reflection; and e) Teaching Outside of Specialty. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how this literature related to the work I did and identifies the holes I believe exist in this area.

General Education

Teacher Adaptive Expertise

Duffy et al. (2008) examined “thoughtfully adaptive teaching” (p. 160) as part of a series of longitudinal studies focused on teacher actions within literacy instruction. The eight participants ranged from preservice educators to those with 31 years of experience, and all taught in Title 1 schools. Researchers observed teachers’ instructional practices and conducted interviews to assess whether adaptations were planned or unplanned, and students were also
interviewed to see if they understood why their teachers made different teaching adaptations. Duffy et al. (2008) defined thoughtfully adaptive teaching as “making a non-routine, proactive decision (i.e., it is not something we see the teacher do in other observations) that requires thought and is invented on the spot in order to make instruction suitable for the goal the teacher is pursuing” (Duffy et al., 2008, p. 163). Observed adaptations were coded with the former definition in mind along with a separate coding system for the rationale behind the adaptations.

Teachers mainly used adaptations in the form of examples, analogies, or metaphors most often and also changed the strategy or activity used to meet class learning objectives. Less frequently occurring adaptations included adding a mini-lesson, suggesting a different perspective, or omitting a planned activity or assignment. Rationales for adaptations centered around helping students make connections to prior knowledge and meeting objectives. Experienced teachers displayed more instances of adaptations which used considerable amounts of metacognitive thought while preservice teachers showed lesser amounts; however, most adaptations across all levels of teacher experience required minimal amounts of thought. Duffy et al. (2008) suggested that to foster more thoughtful adaptive teaching, teacher educators should provide students with appropriate scaffolding of strategies and use case examples to help build in-the-moment decision making skills. Recommendations for future research included examining teacher planning in relation to thoughtful decision making in addition to continuing to examine “on-the-fly” (Duffy et al., 2008, p. 169) decisions.

The purpose of Vogt and Rogalla’s (2009) quasi-experimental study was to examine the development of adaptive teaching competency and understand its influence on student learning. Researchers used an identical pre- and post-test comparison with an experimental group of 32 teachers and 623 students and a control group of 18 teachers and 353 students in Switzerland.
Teachers in the experimental group had training on Adaptive Teaching Competency, which “consists of the four dimensions: subject knowledge, diagnosis, teaching methods, and classroom management” (Vogt & Rogalla, 2009, p. 1052), as well as content-focused coaching with a mentor in their classroom. All teacher participants responded to vignettes about lesson planning and then watched and responded to a video of a researcher-developed lesson sequence in which non-adaptive teaching practices were displayed. Teachers were asked to provide adaptive responses to incidents in the video that were seen as non-adaptive. Researchers compared results of the experimental group with the control group and found that although teachers in both groups showed an increase in scores on the post-test, those who had training on Adaptive Teaching Competency were better able to develop these skills and their students showed better learning outcomes than those teachers who did not have training. Researchers also concluded that this study indicates teacher adaptive teaching competency affects student learning outcomes.

Non-routine adaptations were the focus of an instrumental case study by Parsons et al. (2010). Using a social constructivist perspective, researchers examined adaptive teaching in 24 primary teachers at Title 1 schools with a range of one to 27 years of experience. Classroom observations served as the main source for analysis while lesson plans and interviews added to the final data set. A total of 154 observations were coded for adaptations and rationales using a preexisting coding system (Duffy et al., 2008) and, as in previous studies by this same research team, a rubric was used to rate the thoughtfulness of teacher adaptations. Consistent with previous findings, teachers in this study used adaptations that required minimal thought most frequently with only 3% rated as considerably thoughtful. Most adaptations were in the form of example or analogy, which researchers coded as requiring minimal thought. Rationales also required minimal thought, with helping students make connections as the most frequently
occurring. While researchers noted that some teachers were more thoughtfully adaptive than others, the reasons for this remained unclear. As in previous studies, this research team indicated that little is known about teacher education strategies that help foster adaptive teaching practices and more research in this area is needed.

Parsons (2012) used a theoretical framework of social constructivism and teacher metacognition to study adaptive teaching in literacy instruction. Participants in this instrumental, multiple case study included two third-grade teachers, one with 8 years of teaching and one with four years of teaching. Each taught in a diverse Title 1 school in the Southeastern United States. Data collection included observations, lesson plans, and interviews. The researcher chose to study each teacher one at a time indicating it allowed for better familiarity with the classrooms and teachers. Parsons (2012) collected frequency counts of adaptations using the same coding system used in his own prior research and with other teams of researchers, and determined tasks to be closed, moderately open, or open. Open tasks included more student choice and agency.

Findings indicated that “These teachers’ adaptations were almost entirely in response to students” (Parsons, 2012, p. 163). Parsons noted that scaffolding played a large part in the teachers’ adaptive decisions, and that adaptations occurred less often when teachers were leading activities (closed tasks) and more often when students were working on their own (open tasks), although the possible reasons for this could not be determined. One teacher did not know her students as well as the other teacher and adapted her instruction less frequently, while the teacher who had previous experience with her students was better able to adapt to their needs and did so more frequently.
The purpose of Soslau’s (2012) qualitative case study was to examine ways in which supervisory conferences may provide preservice teachers with opportunities to develop adaptive expertise, with specific attention given to types of discourse and supervision styles. Participants were three undergraduate elementary teacher education majors and their university supervisors, and the study took place during the student teaching internship. Data included observations, interviews, field notes, recordings, and observation feedback forms. Supervisors used a variety of feedback techniques including guiding, telling, and reflecting, yet displayed many missed opportunities to discuss novice teacher problems during their conferences. This suggested that supervising teachers failed to capitalize on learning opportunities that may help student teachers learn to be adaptive educators, and that supervising teachers also lacked critical discourse with the student teachers which may also help develop adaptive expertise. Soslau concluded that too much “telling” hinders development of decision-making and understanding. Supervision styles, types of discourse, and discussion can lead to adaptive expertise learning opportunities, and teachers must learn how to learn from their own learning.

The purpose of Allen et al.’s (2013) qualitative case study was to examine one second grade teacher’s adaptations during planning and while teaching a science-literacy unit. Using a set of adaptation codes and rationale codes constructed from previous literature, researchers observed 20 lessons over a four-week period in a classroom of 23 students. Audiotaped planning sessions and interviews after each lesson contributed to the data set. Findings indicated that the majority of adaptations (60%) were made while teaching, and that the most frequent adaptation was “changing the means by which the lesson objects were met” (Allen et al., 2013, p. 119). Modifications to planning and teaching occurred for a variety of reasons including challenging students, using different strategies to deepen understanding of a concept, modifying the way an
experiment was performed so results could be more accurate, using a mini-lesson within a larger lesson to solidify association and scaffold learning, leading discussions or providing clear and precise instructions when students exhibited difficulty grasping a concept, using analogy and metaphor, and adapting the curriculum materials to meet class needs. The teacher’s adaptations suggested emphasis on a larger goal as well as standards the teacher had for herself and her students’ learning.

Two teachers, one with 20 years of experience and one with two years of experience, were participants in Hayden et al.’s (2013) case study examining the development of adaptive expertise in expert and novice literacy educators. Both teachers were taking a graduate course in which they were required to write reflections after each lesson they taught, and those reflections were analyzed as the sole source of data in this study. Teaching incidents identified in the reflections were first coded as either “problem” or “dilemma” (Hayden et al., 2013, p. 402) and then assessed to determine if an adaption was used to address the incident. In the written reflections, the experienced teacher displayed more instances of adaptations and reflective practice than the novice teacher. The experienced teacher was also more objective toward students’ behavioral issues and tried a variety of strategies to redirect, while the novice teacher often struggled to adapt his teaching to meet the needs of his students and wrote about frustrations and a lack of knowledge about how to fix classroom management problems.

Researchers suggested that the novice teacher may have benefitted from a mentor who could help foster reflective practice and adaptive expertise, as the novice teacher seemed to acknowledge challenges but did not yet recognize how to adjust his teaching practice to help his students meet learning objectives. Although the novice teacher wrote quite a bit during the required reflection assignments, this type of reflection alone may not have been enough for him
to understand and implement reflective practice on his own. Routine expertise seemed evident in the novice teacher’s practice, but he had not yet moved toward an adaptive disposition. Hayden et al. (2013) concluded that the early stage of a teaching career is an important time for supporting the development of adaptive skills, and that teacher educators need to work to be adaptive experts themselves to better respond to their own students’ needs.

Parsons and Vaughn (2013) conducted a multiple case study to examine experienced teachers’ adaptative expertise in two different contexts. Researchers replicated a previous study in which codes for adaptations and reflections were developed (Duffy et al., 2008). The two participants were elementary teachers, one with six years of experience in a rural area and one with seven years of experience in an urban city. Both were from different regions of the United States. Data included lesson plans, observations, and interviews over the course of one school year. Teachers in this study mainly adapted instruction to meet students’ learning needs and to encourage interaction during lessons. Researchers noted that the teachers’ understanding of their students allowed them to adjust their teaching strategies and provide more individualized instruction when necessary. The teachers also allowed student inquiry and interest in the topics at hand to guide instruction without disrupting the overall flow and goals of the lessons. Although the two teachers in this study used different adaptive teaching strategies in their classrooms, researchers concluded this was likely due to the students’ needs as well as the teachers’ experience or expertise. A knowledge of both students and pedagogy as well as the ability to observe and adapt to the unpredictable nature of the classroom environment accounted for the successful implementation of teachers’ adaptive strategies.

Graham (2014) used a theoretical perspective of interpretivism and an epistemological stance of constructivism to understand adaptive expertise in teaching. The conceptual framework
for this narrative inquiry was based upon Schwartz et al.’s (2005) definition of adaptive expertise as innovation plus efficiency. Participants were two expert, secondary English language arts teachers and data was collected through classroom observations, interviews, and reflective memos. Teachers in this study had nine and 12 years of experience. Using Cognitive Task Analysis (Clark et al., 2006), Graham (2014) coded findings into the categories of adaptability and efficiency responses, or a combination of the two.

One teacher had a stronger balance of stand-alone adaptability decisions whereas the other teacher’s adaptability decisions were almost always paired with efficiency decisions. Efficiency decisions were often characterized by time management, procedural processes, and teacher-directed information transfer, while adaptability decisions were characterized by responding to students’ individual and group needs, listening to student feedback and responses before making a decision to adjust, and observing and checking for student understanding.

The researcher noted that knowledge of content was important when trying to adapt instruction, confidence in one’s ability influenced adaptive adjustments, and teachers’ adaptive practices suggested a commitment to reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. “Each teacher described her instructional actions as being initiated in a routine, efficient way – based on prior experience – but continued through adaptive thinking as a means for assessing the appropriateness of an efficient response. Further, they each explain how their students’ responses were the indicators for how and when they acted upon adaptive thinking to support learning within and beyond their classrooms” (Graham, 2014, p. 121).

Vaughn’s (2015) case study examined the reflective practices of two experienced elementary teachers to better understand how reflections may influence adaptive practices within the classroom. Interviews with the teachers and a selected population of their students and class
observations of literacy lessons served as data for the case study. Vaughn (2015) used codes found in exiting literature (Duffy et al., 2008) as well as developed vision codes using pre-lesson interviews with the teacher participants. Both teachers’ adaptations fell most frequently within the codes “changes means by which objectives are met” and “invents an example or analogy,” (pp. 49, 53) and were made most often to help students better understand the material and make connections. The teachers’ knowledge of their students helped them make appropriate changes during instruction, and both teachers identified “making connections” (p. 55) as part of their vision for their classes. Vaughn (2015) concluded that encouraging teachers to reflect on their instructional vision may be helpful in determining how they can best assess their students’ needs. Vaughn (2015) also suggested supporting development of preservice teacher vision through reflective practices and becoming aware of adaptive choices within instruction.

Wetzel et al. (2015) used qualitative methodology to gain an understanding of the impact of reflection prompts upon the dispositions and skills of both experienced and preservice special education teachers. In this pilot study, researchers collaborated with seven experienced special education teachers to develop reflection prompts based on adaptive expertise indicators and assignments completed during the teacher education program. Following the development of the prompts, a small group of four chosen from the original seven participants as well as four teacher candidates in a special education master’s program participated in the pilot study. Interview data was derived from responses to the reflection prompts related to teaching experience and the teacher candidates’ class assignments. Eleven major codes within the categories of adaptive dispositions, metacognitive skills, and cognitive skills were used during analysis.

Findings indicated that the experienced teachers displayed more instances of adaptive expertise dispositions during reflection than the teacher candidates. The adaptive expertise code
most represented by both groups dealt with awareness of skills and knowledge or lack thereof, with the second most represented code pertaining to the need for continued learning. “Findings suggest cognitive flexibility is supported by metacognitive skills and adaptive dispositions” (Wetzel et al., 2015, p. 555). Researchers indicated that, consistent with exiting literature, experienced teachers display more adaptive expertise qualities than teacher candidates. However, researchers also noted that teacher candidates demonstrated signs of emerging adaptive qualities and that adaptive expertise may be able to be developed in conjunction with routine expertise in a teacher education program. Suggestions included encouraging reflection and offering room for discussion related to real-world teaching complexities.

Beltramo (2017) used design-based inquiry to examine the development of adaptive teaching practices using cogenerative dialogues in two high school science teachers, each with more than 10 years of teaching experience. “Cogenerative dialogues represent spaces where teachers meet with representative groups of their students on a regular (usually weekly) basis outside of instructional time to generate, deliberate on, and evaluate ideas toward improved opportunities for student learning” (Beltramo, 2017, p. 327). Over the course of six months, Beltramo (2017) collected data from eight weekly cogenerative dialogues between the two teachers and their student volunteers as well as classroom observations, field notes, and interviews with the teachers after each cogenerative dialogue session. Data were analyzed using sociocultural and adaptive teaching theory to determine the adaptive practices within each classroom.

During the discussions, teachers posed questions to students about topics such as classroom activities or lack of student participation. The students responded with different strategies and ideas that might work for them or other students in the classroom which the
teachers then incorporated into the subsequent lessons as a way of adapting their instruction. The
cogenerative dialogues seemed to promote a much more intentionally student-centered
environment in each of the classrooms. The teachers’ knowledge of their students was enhanced
throughout the conversations, which led to a greater ability to adapt instruction that would better
fit students’ social and learning needs as well as personal interests in the content that was being
studied in the classroom. The conversations also encouraged the teachers to be more creative in
how they delivered lesson content. Beltramo (2017) suggested that cogenerative dialogues may
be especially beneficial for the development of adaptive practices in experienced teachers, as
they helped the participants in this study to become more aware of their students’ needs and use
new innovations and teaching strategies based on their previous knowledge and skills.

Seventeen Finnish primary school math teachers with three to 27 years of experience
participated in Männikkö and Husu’s (2018) multiple case study about teachers’ adaptive
expertise in relation to their personal practical theories. Using previous research, Männikkö and
Husu (2018) defined teachers’ personal practical theories as “beliefs and knowledge structures
that guide their interactional and instructional actions, which are developed via their teaching
experiences” (Männikkö & Husu, 2018, p. 27). Researchers watched videos of classroom
observations to find examples of teachers adapting instruction during lessons. Participants were
shown these examples during the stimulated recall interviews and adaptations were categorized
into themes based upon how and when the knowledge was acquired by the teachers – what the
researchers referred to as “fixed or open orientations” to teaching (Männikkö & Husu, 2018, p.
130). A fixed orientation suggests more reliance on routines or habits and predetermined
strategies when addressing instructional issues in the classroom where an open orientation
suggests that a teacher uses information and observations gathered during the interactive
teaching phase to process and create new ways of addressing an instructional issue.

Teachers were found to have low, moderate, and high levels of adaptive expertise. Low adaptive expertise was characterized by a mostly fixed orientation, and a heavy reliance on prior experience and preconceived ideas about students and their learning habits without much consideration for or interpretation of what was occurring in the classroom. Teachers who exhibited moderate adaptive expertise presented both fixed and open orientations and were more reflective about their actions in the classroom. Finally, those who had high adaptive expertise also had a mostly open orientation to teaching and based their adaptions on “interactive observations rather than vague generalisations or even biases” (Männikkö & Husu, 2018, p. 132). These teachers combined past experiences with present issues and knowledge of students in the classroom when making adaptations.

Researchers found that teachers with more experience seemed to be less adaptive overall. Findings also indicated that beliefs about teaching impact adaptive expertise levels, and those with a more fixed orientation are less likely to develop adaptive expertise regardless of the longevity of their teaching experience. In this study, teachers with high adaptive expertise thought about and reflected more deeply upon classroom interactions, used innovation and creativity to work out issues, and were more focused on the paths that led them to the creation of knowledge and skills. Conversely, teachers with low adaptive expertise were less concerned about how their knowledge was constructed.

Männikkö and Husu (2018) concluded that the development of adaptative expertise should be encouraged and supported in preservice teacher education programs. “To achieve this aim, we suggest that teacher educators should pay more attention to three viewpoints when developing study programmes: (1) teachers should feel familiar with reflective practices; (2)
teachers should be able to test their situational sensitivity in teaching practicums; and (3) teachers should be guided on how to be aware of their routines and how to develop them” (Männikkö & Husu, 2018, p. 136).

Using qualitative inquiry methods, Bowers et al. (2020) examined five science teachers’ use of adaptive and routine expertise during implementation of the same lesson in their separate elementary classrooms. The teachers, each with four or more years of experience, were involved in a professional development program designed to support science teachers with implementation of Next Generation Science Standards. Researchers analyzed teacher lesson reflections and viewed videos of the classes in which the lessons took place. Findings indicated that teachers displayed instances of both adaptive and routine expertise throughout their lessons and that teachers in classes that utilized a lot of discussion displayed more adaptative practices. Characteristics of adaptive expertise found within lesson included facilitating discourse, encouraging students to build upon one another’s comments, and allowing student agency while characteristics of routine expertise included teacher-only explanations and teacher-led discussion.

Findings also suggested that teachers with the most experience displayed the most amount of routine expertise, while teachers with the least experience were more adaptive and that teachers who promoted a student-centered classroom were more adaptive while those who used more teacher-centered methods were less adaptive. Researchers concluded that “teachers need to be able to recognize and respond to student emergent understanding, introduce new vocabulary through student experience, encourage more student-to-student interactions, and make room for more student explanation of phenomena prior to direct instruction” (Bowers et al., 2020, p. 52), and that professional development time could be used to help teachers
understand adaptive and routine expertise as well as identify instances of both within their own teaching practices.

In summary, studies in this section suggest that adaptive expertise should be encouraged in preservice teacher education programs through means of reflection, discussion with experienced teachers and mentors, and real-world experiences which would provide opportunities for practicing in-the-moment decision making (Männikkö & Husu, 2018; Soslau, 2012; Wetzel, et al., 2015). Additionally, teachers were found most often to change lesson plans and make in-the-moment teaching decisions to meet the learning needs of their students. While these strategies can include different modes of implementation, thoughtful adaptations should be distinguished from those which occur routinely as they may reveal insights into how teachers are adaptive and which situations call for the most focused adaptive efforts. Encouraging teachers to reflect on their pedagogical practices can help foster adaptiveness, especially in experienced teachers who may find themselves relying more on classroom routines or falling behind in learning new or innovative teaching strategies.

*Teacher Thought and Action*

Borko and Livingston (1989) examined the thinking and actions of four student teachers (novices) and their cooperating teachers (experts) within a mathematics context. Data collection for the cross-case analysis included one week of observations as well as interviews prior to and after each lesson relating to planning and reflection. Expert teachers’ planning procedures revealed that they used both long- and short-term methods and that they thought about planning and details of lessons throughout the day rather than during specific planning periods. Expert teachers also preferred mental planning rather than formal written plans and were able to anticipate what might happen during a lesson as they planned. Conversely, novice teachers
indicated a preference toward more short-term planning, scripting, and mental rehearsing of lessons. Although their plans seemed to be flexible, the novice teachers had difficulty predicting what students may have difficulty understanding.

Expert teachers were better able to “translate their plans into action” (Borko & Livingston, 1989, p. 487) than novice teachers and maintained a balance between student-centered and teacher-directed instruction. Expert teachers also were more successful at navigating classroom disruptions and student questions to keep the lesson on track while novice teachers struggled to answer student questions for which they were unprepared, leading to off-task student behavior and difficulty returning to the lesson content. Expert teachers’ reflections were mainly focused on student learning and understanding while novice teachers’ reflections focused more on their own teaching effectiveness, lesson success, and student behavioral concerns.

Researchers concluded that expert teachers’ activities support the notion that teaching is improvisational, as teachers made adjustments to their preplanned outlines during the interactive teaching sessions according to student needs. Although Borko and Livingston (1989) indicated there is still much to be learned about how novices become experts, this study revealed that, “Experts can plan more quickly and efficiently than novices because they are able to combine information from existing schemata to fit the particulars of a given lesson. Novices, in contrast, often have to develop, or at least modify and elaborate, their available schemata” (Borko & Livingston, 1989, p. 490).

Moallem (1993) examined one experienced middle school science teacher’s thinking and teaching in an attempt to provide a holistic view of the instructional processes of thinking, planning, interactive teaching, and reflection. Over a seven-month period of data collection and
following ethnographic methods, Moallem (1993) used stimulated recall interviews, post-teaching interviews, observations, classroom teaching artifacts, and microanalysis of actions and cognitive behavior to complete the data set. Findings indicated that the participant’s pedagogical knowledge, beliefs about teaching, and her own teacher identity shaped the ways in which she plans for and executes instruction within her classroom. The participant’s knowledge of her students and the context in which she teaches were important factors in her instructional practices.

The participant planned long- and short-term and used written and mental planning strategies. Long-term planning was content-focused and began in the summer before school started, while short-term planning, which focused more on objectives and goals, was ongoing throughout the school year. Reflection on previous lessons was a key factor in the participant’s long- and short-term planning processes. Moallem (1993) noted that the participant’s plans and actions did not always align, stating:

However, the relationship between what Sarah planned to do and what happened in the classroom became less predictive when verbal interaction became the dominant teaching method and Sarah chose to let classroom interaction drive the instruction. In such cases, since specific verbal interactions were unpredictable, Sarah changed her plans during interaction by reflection-in-action. As a result, interactive decision-making became more important and pre-planning just shaped the board outlines of what was likely to occur while teaching and was used to manage transitions from one activity to another. (pp. 158-159)

This demonstrates that planning also occurred during the interactive teaching phase, as the teacher made decisions based upon her students’ interests and understandings of the course material.

Findings indicated that the participant’s reflective habits occurred during all phases of instruction, including pre-planning, as she reflected on past events. The participant also reflected in action and self-evaluated after lessons. Her experience in the classroom allowed her to make
quick decisions on the spot while teaching without much hesitation or disruption. The participant’s reflection-in-action was student-centered and responsive, while reflection-on-action was more teacher oriented. The researcher concluded that the present study indicated that the phases of the instructional process are not singular but are instead connected components of the teacher’s thought processes and decision-making.

Literature pertaining to teacher thought and action indicates that experienced teachers may be better able to predict and adapt to student understanding than novice teachers (Borko & Livingston, 1989). Additionally, expert teachers may lean more toward student-centered learning and reflection upon teaching while novice teachers may focus more on perceptions of their own effectiveness and success within the classroom (Borko & Livingston, 1989; Moallem, 1993). Knowledge of students and teacher beliefs about teaching may also contribute to more effective instructional practices (Moallem, 1993).

**Teacher Decision-Making**

Participants in Westerman’s (1991) qualitative study included five expert teachers, each with more than five years of teaching experience, and their undergraduate student teachers. The purpose of the study was to examine decision making using observations of teaching, interviews about planning, stimulated recall, and post-stimulated recall interviews. Results suggested that differences existed between experts and novices in integration of knowledge, student behavior, and interaction during planning, teaching, and reflection (Westerman, 1991, p. 295). Experts thought about things from the perspective of the students while planning, were able to tie current subject matter together with previously learned material or other subjects and changed curriculum and materials to meet students’ needs. Novices, however, focused more on student behavior, and classroom management often disrupted the flow of lessons. Novices frequently
struggled with understanding why students behaved the way they did. Westerman indicated that planning, teaching, and reflection were “highly related” (Westerman, 1991, p. 298) for expert teachers, but novice teachers approach them more separately. “In other words, they planned; they taught the lessons; and then they evaluated them. The three stages of decision making did not connect to each other in a dynamic way, as they did for the experts” (Westerman, 1991, p. 299).

Using case study methodology, Griffith et al. (2015) examined in-the-moment teaching decisions of eight elementary teachers, each having more than five years of teaching experience. Researchers observed whole- and small-group reading lessons led by participants as well as individual student-teacher conferences, and then conducted individual post-lesson interviews using open ended questions and stimulated recall techniques. Findings indicated that in-the-moment decisions in both small- and whole-group contexts primarily centered around comprehension and motivation and engagement. However, more decisions about curricular connections were made during whole-group instruction and more decisions about problem-solving strategies were made during small-group instruction. Researchers noted that more types of decisions were observed overall during small-group instruction. During individual conferences, participants made more problem-solving strategy decisions than any other type, although decisions based upon assessing understanding were identified more commonly during individual conferences than during small- or whole-group instruction. Researchers suggested that context, use of both pedagogical content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of individual students contributed to the in-the-moment decisions made by participants and that small-group instruction allowed for more in-the-moment teaching decisions than other teaching contexts.
Findings within literature about teacher decision-making suggest that expert teachers who focus on the perspectives of their students may be better able to connect subject matter with previously learned material and other subject areas (Westerman, 1991). Expert teachers may also be better able to integrate the separate planning, teaching, and reflective phases of the instructional process while novice teachers tend to approach each area separately (Westerman, 1991). Additionally, in-the-moment decision by experienced teachers may be influenced by a greater focus on student learning outcomes, comprehension, and motivation and engagement (Griffith et al., 2015).

**Teaching Outside of Specialty**

A 2007 qualitative study by Childs and McNicholl reported findings related to perceived challenges faced by secondary school science teachers working outside their specialty areas in the United Kingdom. Deliberate sampling was used to select six novice and 18 experienced teachers and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather viewpoints of physics, biology, and chemistry teachers. While all teachers worked in some area of science, they were not always teaching their chosen area of expertise. Researchers reported, “What was striking in our findings was the similarities of the issues and challenges all our respondents, regardless of experience, perceived they faced when teaching outside subject specialism and how they coped with them” (p. 8). Issues and challenges teachers reported included finding appropriate teaching strategies, thinking long-term about key concepts students needed to learn in order to build upon previous knowledge, explaining information in ways students would easily understand without confusion, motivating students, and avoiding rigid teaching practices. Participants mainly navigated challenges of teaching outside of specialty by reading textbooks and seeking help from colleagues who were specialists. Researchers suggested experience in the field may contribute to
better understanding of pedagogical practices including classroom management, and non-formal learning in the field from working with or observing experienced teachers may inform teacher education practices.

The identities of science and mathematics teachers working out-of-field was the focus of Hobbs’ (2013) pilot study in rural and regional schools in Victoria, Australia. Twenty-three secondary school teachers, leadership, and support staff were interviewed to gather background information, perceptions about teaching within and outside of specialty, coping strategies, preservice teacher education preparation, professional development, and how professional identities may influence teaching. Teachers in the study reported feeling unable to personally relate to out-of-field subjects and felt disconnected to the subject they were teaching. Additionally, they had difficulty making personal connections, telling stories, or finding the out-of-field subject interesting thereby contributing to the overall perceived effectiveness of teaching. Primary level specialists felt out of place in secondary areas, even if the subject being taught, such as math, was the same. Teachers reported having more positive feelings toward out-of-field teaching when it was a choice rather than when they were simply placed in an area due to hiring needs. Overall, researchers found that out-of-field teaching had both positive and negative impacts on teacher identity and perceived roles as teachers. The level of support provided by school leadership also impacted out-of-field teachers’ identities and how they perceived themselves as educators. Researchers suggested that further studies should examine the impact of out-of-field teaching on student learning, engagement, and behavior and whether depth of knowledge within a certain field contributes to positive learning outcomes. Additionally, outcomes of this study indicated that out-of-field positions may not be particularly suited to the needs of novice teachers.
Du Plessis et al. (2014) examined out-of-field teaching and professional development practices in Australia and South Africa through a phenomenological study focusing on the lived experiences and meaning making of educational directors, principals, specialists, out-of-field teachers, and parents. Purposeful sampling of participants and semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis were used to gather data. Out-of-field teachers reported feeling “not good enough” (p. 94) and guilty for not knowing what to do when teaching outside their areas of expertise. Additionally, feelings of isolation and overwhelm, insecurity, lack of confidence, and lack of support from leadership influenced several participants to seek their own ways of helping themselves when they perceived pedagogical deficiencies in their teaching. Often, out-of-field teachers felt that educational leaders had unrealistic expectations of them and felt as though they were simply a commodity when discussions of hiring and budgets were presented. Findings indicated that school leadership may play a large role in how out-of-field teachers perceive themselves and their teaching abilities, especially in challenging classroom situations. Researchers suggested that perhaps larger policy practices should be developed in order to better support out-of-field teachers, starting with the hiring process and setting clear expectations for the kinds of support and professional development that these teachers may need.

To better understand the lived experiences of novice out-of-field teachers, Du Plessis et al. (2015) conducted an interpretive phenomenological study focused on the relationship between these teachers and school leadership practices. Four teachers in their first and second years of teaching and their principals were selected from a previous study (Du Plessis et al., 2014), and informal conversations, interviews, classroom observations, and email communication were used as data. Researchers found that out-of-field novice teachers struggled to connect concepts within
the classroom and didn’t feel “at home” in out-of-field teaching spaces (p. 16). Novice teachers also felt exposed and worried about their teaching evaluations. Principals in this study were quoted using phrases such as “it is what it is,” “you are just teaching,” and “just cope” (p. 18) which may have contributed to novice teachers’ feelings of inadequacy. Researchers “argue that assigning novice teachers in out-of-field positions puts them ‘in transit’ and in temporary positions” (p. 6), and that misconceptions and misunderstandings of school leaders concerning educators’ abilities to teach any subject regardless of specialization may contribute to novice teachers’ negative perceptions of their teaching experiences. Researchers suggested that communication remain open and that school leaders take part in learning the needs of out-of-field teachers in order to best help meet their needs, especially during the early years of their careers.

Teachers who work outside their specialty areas often face challenges including feelings of inadequacy and perceived lack of support from school leadership which may contribute to difficulty in selecting and navigating appropriate instructional strategies. Out-of-field teachers may experience a disconnect between their personal identities as educators and the subjects they are teaching (Hobbs, 2013) and a lack of confidence in their abilities to effectively teach outside their chosen area of expertise (Du Plessis et al., 2014, 2015). Research has indicated that lack of appropriate support from school leadership may contribute to feelings of insecurity and a lack of confidence, especially in novice teachers working out-of-field (Du Plessis, 2014, 2015). To navigate the challenges of teaching in out-of-field situations, teachers often seek the support of colleagues or other specialists and look for resources to supplement their perceived lack of pedagogical content knowledge (Childs & McNicholl, 2007).
In a *Journal of Music Teacher Education* interest article, Brinkman (1995) offered suggestions for music teacher educators to consider when trying to adjust to difficult teaching situations or when finding solutions to problems within the classroom. Brinkman (1995) outlined three approaches to thinking: algorithms and heuristics, schema theory, and creative thinking. Algorithms provide “mechanical and sequential” (p. 9) quick fixes or solutions to problems while heuristic approaches use prior knowledge, experience, and thought to form an array of possible solutions which may best fit the situation. Relating to heuristic problem-solving, Brinkman stated, “Prospective music teachers need assistance in understanding the jumble of the music classroom. This helps the process of moving toward the ‘expert’ thinking of the experienced educator” (Brinkman, 1995, p. 9). Schema theory uses details and “scripts” (Brinkman, 1995, p. 9) that help a teacher interact with specific situations such as those that may occur within a particular setting like concert band or choir while creative thinking fosters teaching adaptability and independence. Brinkman cites Wakefield (1992), suggesting that problems and solutions lie on a continuum that require four kinds of thinking: logical (closed problem and closed solution), insight (open problem and closed solution), divergent (closed problem and open solution), and creative (open problem and open solution) wherein “closed” represents a problem or solution that is known. Brinkman (1995) suggested that Wakefield’s (1992) model of thinking can be applied to music classrooms, especially in the form of classroom management which often requires creative problem solving, and that music teacher educators must help preservice educators understand different ways of thinking and approaches to dealing with conflict through modeling and observation experiences. Thinking about teaching
can also be an effective strategy in continued professional development for experienced music educators as they learn how to “solve the problems of tomorrow” (Brinkman, 1995, p. 13) effectively and efficiently.

**Teacher Decision-Making**

Recently, one team of researchers has begun examining pre-instructional and instructional decision-making among experienced and expert music educators. Johnson and Matthews’ (2017) indicated that reflection-in-action was evident in the instructional decision making of participants as they discussed the need to make in-the-moment choices while teaching. Seven experienced general music teachers with five or more years of teaching experience and holding either a graduate degree or National Board Certification responded to open-ended responses to hypothetical classroom scenarios. Researchers developed nine themes from participant responses using the categories of planning, instruction, and reflection. Participant comments about planning included items related to student learning objectives and acquisition of musical skills and knowledge as well as non-musical aspects of learning such as fostering a long-term appreciation for music and helping students with life skills such as working together and respecting others. Pedagogy, theories and methods, scaffolding, and classroom management were themes related to instruction, and themes related to reflection included the need to be flexible when making instructional decisions, professional development, and assessing students. Understanding how experienced music teachers make decisions within their classrooms may help teacher educators support preservice music teachers to anticipate challenges and develop problem-solving and decision-making strategies and may also provide professional development opportunities for inservice music educators.
In a similar study about instructional decision-making, Matthews and Johnson (2019) examined open-ended responses to rehearsal scenarios from 40 expert choral and instrumental ensemble directors. The purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which expert music teachers plan, deliver, and reflect on instruction. Pedagogy, student motivation, and classroom management were determined to be the three main instructional challenges, and similar responses were recorded from both instrumental and choral educators. As with the previous study, implications for the profession included fostering self-awareness, providing preservice teacher support, and offering professional development opportunities for inservice teachers.

Expanding upon their own research about instructional decision-making, Johnson and Matthews (2020) examined pre-instructional decisions of 68 expert music teachers enrolled in online master’s programs. Rather than use a qualitative approach as in previous studies, researchers developed a survey instrument with Likert-type items covering curriculum standards, pre-service training, physical environment, physical activity experiences, teaching experiences, collaboration with other teachers, material and equipment, level of preparation in the subject matter, and assessment. Participant responses indicated that teaching experience was the most influential factor on pre-instructional decision making while availability or lack of materials also ranked high. The least influential factor was curriculum. Implications for the profession included reframing professional development to address “perceived dependence on pedagogical resources such as musical instruments and space for movement activities, thereby limiting their instructional planning decisions” (Johnson & Matthews, 2020, p. 18).

Recent music education literature pertaining to teacher decision-making has examined both pre-instructional and instructional decision-making (Johnson & Matthews, 2017; Matthews & Johnson, 2019, 2020). Researchers have suggested that inservice teachers need to be flexible
when making pedagogical and instructional decisions and teacher educators should work to develop problem-solving strategies with preservice teachers so that they may be better prepared to adapt in real time within their classrooms (Johnson & Matthews, 2017). Additionally, teacher educators can help preservice students prepare for the challenges of teaching by encouraging self-awareness (Matthews & Johnson, 2019) and inservice teachers should be supported with appropriate professional development opportunities that may help them understand the relationship between decision-making and the execution of planning, instruction, and reflection (Matthews & Johnson, 2019, 2020).

**Teacher Reflection**

Part of effective problem solving involves a cycle of reflection, which includes thinking about teaching before, during, and after instruction. Butke (2006) examined the relationship between reflective processes and classroom teaching practices of five middle and high school choral teachers to understand this cycle within the field of music education. Over the course of nine weeks, participants responded to journal prompts and wrote unstructured reflections and an autobiographical narrative. Butke (2006) also observed teachers and conducted individual and focus group interviews. To facilitate stimulated recall with the teachers, their students also participated by answering reflective prompts developed by the researcher and teachers at the end of the data collection period. Findings indicated that all of the teacher participants used the reflective process as a catalyst for incorporating new teaching methods or activities in their classrooms. However, some teachers had difficulty with assessing their own instructional deficiencies and were resistant or unable to implement changes in their practice. By participating in this study, the teachers were externally motivated to reflect on their practice, but the researcher determined that they became more intrinsically motivated throughout the process as
they noticed positive changes brought about by their reflective practices. The researcher suggested that “reflection-fore-action” should be considered and added to the existing paradigm, as it “incorporates all possibilities of reflections that transpire before a teaching episode occurs” (Butke, 2006, p. 64).

Using qualitative teacher inquiry, one music teacher and one music educator participated in Reynolds and Beitler’s (2007) study about reflective practice in a middle-school instrumental setting. Data collection occurred in two phases. In phase one, the music teacher wrote reflections in a journal and asked sixth-grade band students to respond to reflection prompts as well. In phase two, the two researchers worked together to connect their experiences and understandings of reflective practice. The music teacher used student responses to journal prompts to modify instruction and lesson plans and used her own reflective journal to process and understand the ways in which she dealt with unexpected challenges and disruptions to her normal, daily routines such as weather delays or school schedule changes. The student reflections in this study helped the music teacher recognize that although she anticipated and planned for various situations her students might encounter during class, those predictions and assumptions may have prevented her from recognizing valuable learning opportunities during instruction. As the music teacher said, “Those assumptions can be dangerous because they do not allow for the individuality of the students one is teaching at that moment” (Reynolds & Beitler, 2007, p. 66). The researchers concluded that documenting reflection may help music teachers recognize patterns and be better prepared to solve unpredictable or complex problems within their classrooms.

Within music education, literature pertaining to teacher reflection has indicated that reflective practices should be promoted among novice and experienced educators. Butke (2006) and Reynolds and Beitler (2007) found that reflective practices could encourage teachers to be
more creative when planning and may help teachers problem solve more effectively as they think about patterns and complexities that arise within their classrooms.

**Teaching Outside of Specialty**

Allard (1992) viewed videotapes of 12 specialists and nine non-specialists teaching elementary strings classes in seven different states to gain an understanding of time use, student attentiveness, and performance quality. The videos were viewed three times, and the researcher focused on one specific aspect of teaching during individual viewings. Time use was studied in the categories of performance and non-performance, student attentiveness was measured by recording on-task and off-task behavior, and performance quality was examined by three judges using a performance quality assessment form that included playing position, group tone, group intonation, playing together, left hand technique, right hand technique, rhythmic accuracy, and group musicality (p. 80). Findings indicated that although specialists and non-specialists used their instructional time similarly, performance quality was higher in classes taught by specialists. Student attentiveness was comparable between classes taught by specialists and non-specialists as well. Allard (1992) noted, “The differences in the performance scores of classes taught by specialists and non-specialists seem to indicate that the content of what was being described or modelled may be more effectively rendered by the specialist than the non-specialist” (p. 116). Results of the study indicated that collegiate courses and private lessons on string instruments may contribute to higher performance scores in classes taught by specialists.

Hamann and Ebie (2009) conducted informal interviews with five juniors majoring in music education to gain an understanding of how prepared they felt to teach across music disciplines. Although they recognized that many of their peers held positions teaching outside of their concentration, students in this study were drawn to specialize in a particular area of music
and did not particularly want to teach outside of that specialty after graduation. Participants’ responses to a question about concerns regarding teaching outside of their chosen area were grouped into four main themes: “Not knowing enough about specific techniques, pedagogy, or performing skills in the area to guide students; not being competent, confident, or prepared enough to effectively teach in that area; not having the knowledge to be able to address student questions/requests or help them advance; I would feel comfortable and confident – I believe information from other classes would transfer” (p. 46). Only about 10% of the participants felt they would be comfortable and confident teaching outside their chosen area of expertise. Based on the results of this study, Hamann and Ebie (2009) suggested that more focus on teaching technique, teaching strategies, and delivery of instruction, rather than philosophy or resources, may be necessary in methods courses, as these were areas in which participants were most interested.

The purpose of Robinson’s (2010) study was to understand why instrumentalists choose to teach general music and what factors influence those decisions. Using purposeful sampling, Robinson (2010) surveyed seven graduates of his institution’s music teacher preparation program. Themes that arose from the data included preference for working with young children, concerns about work/life balance, aversion to the “culture of competition, and concerns regarding perceived limitations of instrumental music teaching and learning as it exists in schools (p. 36). Findings suggested that although participants seemed satisfied with being instrumentalists themselves, many aspects of teaching instrumental music in schools such as marching band, festivals, competition, and a lack of room for creativity and development of musicianship steered them away from choosing jobs in this area. The teaching environment associated with instrumental music in schools, then, did not align with these participants’ values
or personalities as educators. Robinson (2010) noted that tracking, or specialization, in degree programs may lead to students to miss opportunities or discover new ideas about “what it means to be a music educator” (p. 44) and may contribute to young teachers leaving the profession due to personality and course content misalignment. Suggestions for preservice teacher education included the need for career counseling and an increased awareness and concern for why students choose not to become instrumental music educators beyond what may be easily seen during the collegiate years.

Corfield-Adams (2012) conducted a multiple case study of six general music teachers who identified as instrumentalists during their undergraduate degree programs. Tensions between professional and personal identities were examined through semi-structured interviews, participant essays, transcripts, notebooks, and institutional websites and data were presented using both narrative and case study approaches. When asked about the nature of their undergraduate programs, two of the participants described them as well rounded, one felt that there was a singular focus, two felt they didn’t pay enough attention in class because they didn’t feel it applied to them or they simply didn’t absorb the information well, and one felt as though the program couldn’t cram more into the curriculum in a four-year degree. Some participants felt that tracking, or specializing in one area of music, may have hindered their ability to see themselves as general music teachers during their undergraduate studies. Additionally, some would have preferred more coursework outside of their specialty so they would be better prepared for teaching a variety of music education classes. One teacher wished he would have discovered general music earlier or realized that he was going to like it sooner so that he took more opportunities to work in that area. Corfield-Adams (2012) noted, “All of this evidence suggests that a more general, less tracked approach to undergraduate music teacher education
could provide some students with the opportunity to discover their personal preference earlier and give others a better footing to stand upon if they find themselves teaching in areas of music education outside instrumental ensembles” (p. 253). Recommendations for practice include providing support to inservice teachers who are working outside of their specialty area, making professional resources more accessible within schools, and perhaps even assigning mentors to assist teachers in areas they feel less comfortable.

A multiple case study design was used to examine string specialists’ and non-string specialists’ content and pedagogical knowledge while teaching a strings class (Grieser, 2014). Six participants were observed teaching, and individual interviews completed the data set. Findings suggested that non-string specialists were not as detailed in their instruction of teaching string-specific concepts, and often provided “partial or vague” information to students (p. 186). In the specific areas of vibrato, shifting, and spiccato, non-string specialists were not always able to describe basic principles of technique in the same ways as the string specialists. String specialists demonstrated a deeper understanding of the necessary connections between fundamental, general technique and string-specific technique while non-string specialists’ instruction “lacked conceptual connections” (p. 193). Rather than demonstrate technique themselves, non-string specialists relied on instructional videos and method books which may have contributed to lack of detail and over-simplification of information which in turn appeared to negatively impact instruction. Recommendations for practice included the need for string-specific professional development and support and an increased awareness of the effectiveness of collegiate methods and techniques courses. Additionally, it may be beneficial for non-string specialists to observe string teachers during their degree programs or for student teaching to include strings classes.
Using case study design, Kuebel (2017) interviewed one first-year music educator working teaching outside of his specialty area. The participant, who identified as an instrumentalist but was teaching elementary general music, faced geographical limitations and challenges in finding open instrumental positions during the job search. Although he had general music methods, he did not student teach at that level and found that he had to help himself on the job much more than rely on what he learned in his undergraduate classes. He mentioned that there was not much discussion about the possibility of teaching outside his specialty area during his education and relayed that having a strong sense of self-efficacy and high expectations for himself and his students helped him navigate the challenges of teaching outside his chosen area of expertise. Suggestions based upon this participant’s experience included the “need to discuss the reality of the job market with undergraduate students, implement activities that support the development of self-efficacy, and provide students with authentic-context learning experiences in multiple areas of music education” (pp. 14-15).

Music educators with a string specialization teaching students to play wind instruments in California were the focus of Arnold’s (2018) qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of six teachers’ knowledge and competency as well as challenges they faced and the impact of their teaching on student learning. Nine overarching themes were discussed: (a) methods classes, (b) learning from colleagues, (c) printed and digital resources, (d) teacher proficiency on wind instruments, (e) wind techniques, (f) student activities for growth, (g) knowledge of wind literature, (h) personal growth teaching winds, and (i) student outcomes (p. 26). Findings indicated that teachers felt methods courses did not provide adequate instruction for confidence in teaching outside their specialty, and that most of their knowledge was gained in the field, during student teaching, by learning from colleagues, and from attending
conferences. Some teachers relayed that demonstrating on wind instruments helped them become more proficient and confident on the secondary instruments, but others mentioned they brought specialists into their classrooms because they could not play the wind instruments well enough to model for their students. A few teachers took private lessons or practiced on their own to acquire necessary performance skills. Because they were string players, participants in the study also found it challenging to teach aspects of playing wind instruments that occurred inside the mouth and that could not easily be seen. While some educators enjoyed teaching winds, most felt like teaching strings was more satisfying overall. Many of the teachers in this study did not intend to teach outside of their specialty but accepted that they would be expected to do so due to California’s broad music education licensure practice. Suggestions for future research included on-site observations of teachers as well as studying a larger population of both experienced and novice educators.

Music educators often find themselves teaching outside of their specialization for a number of reasons. Studies have indicated that teachers do not always plan to teach in positions outside of their chosen field of experience, yet factors such as geographical limitations and challenges in finding open positions during the job search (Kuebel, 2017) and licensure practices (Arnold, 2018) can contribute to this phenomenon. Challenges arise when teaching outside of one’s specialty, such as lack of pedagogical content knowledge (Allard, 1992; Corfield-Adams, 2012), feelings of being underprepared (Corfield-Adams, 2012; Hamann & Ebie, 2009; Robinson, 2010), and difficulty relaying information to students and making meaningful connections (Grieser, 2014).
Chapter II Summary

Chapter II provided a review of literature used to frame and inform this study. Categories presented included: a) Teacher Adaptive Expertise; b) Teacher Thought and Action; c) Teacher Decision Making; d) Teacher Reflection; and e) Teaching Outside of Specialty in the areas of general and music education. While this body of literature provided useful information during the formation of my study about how teachers adapt to changing classroom situations and the thought processes behind those adaptations, it did not provide much insight into the work of teachers in multiple music classroom contexts. This is an area that appears to be largely underrepresented in research, and I had difficulty finding literature that discussed this notion. However, I found many studies that addressed teachers who work outside of their specialty. While related, this is a bit different than working in multiple music classroom contexts as teaching outside of a specialty often pertains to teaching an entirely different subject matter than one’s area of expertise (for example, a math specialist teaching English or a chemist teaching biology) and does not apply to situations where teachers are working with multiple age groups throughout the day or even within the same class period. For music teachers, broad all-grade and all-subject licensure may impact what teachers are certified, but not necessarily qualified, to teach due to degree tracking and specialization in preservice education programs. In addition to the need for literature about teaching in multiple music classroom contexts, more literature is necessary identifying the connections between music licensure practices and degree tracking in order to understand career trajectories and reasons why teachers may choose to work in positions that require them to be in multiple music classroom contexts.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

Purpose Statement and Central Question

The purpose of this study was to represent the professional lives and work of four experienced music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts. The central question developed for this study was: How do participants describe the key elements in their professional lives and work in multiple music classroom contexts?

Design

I chose a qualitative approach for this study, as “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). The work of this study drew from portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which was first used by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot in a book detailing the “lives, rhythms, and rituals” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 12) of several high schools in urban, suburban, and elite populations. She likened telling the stories of these schools on paper to an artist painting portraits on canvas, and was inspired to create representations of the schools in this manner after reminiscing on her experiences as the subject of paintings, sculptures, drawings, and photography (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. ix). Since the initial exploration of this writing style, portraiture has been extensively detailed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), critically examined (Brooks, 2017; Dixson et al., 2005; Travis, 2020), and used in dissertations, particularly within the social sciences (Rivera, 2006) and education (McCarthy, 2017; Moore, 2011).
Portraiture is “a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). It challenges the researcher to accurately represent participant perspectives while also weaving her own voice and understanding into the narrative. The use of portraiture was of particular interest to me for this study as it allowed me to connect to my own lived experiences as a music teacher working in multiple music classroom contexts. Portraiture is defined by five central elements: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xvii).

The context of each portrait must be thoroughly examined and explained through both researcher and participant perspectives. Context helps the researcher position the participants in a specific space and time. Describing context includes a comprehensive recounting of the physical setting as well as historical and symbolic qualities that may help readers feel as though they are present in the space where the portrait is unfolding. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest that the researcher’s voice is critical in this part of portraiture, and language such as “from where I sit, this is what I see” (p. 50) should be present in the writing. In this study, I used context to center the reader at the beginning of each participant’s portrait, intertwining my own experiences and perceptions about the physical settings into which I entered throughout the information I gathered from the participants.

While the researcher’s voice is essential in portraiture, careful attention must be given to balancing interpretation and positionality. The portraitist’s voice should never overpower the participant’s. The orientation of voice in portraiture can vary from restrained to quite visible, and Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) offer six ways in which voice may be used: as witness; as
interpretation; as preoccupation; as autobiography; listening for voice; and voice in conversation (p. 87). In this study, I primarily used my voice as a witness, or outside observer, and I used my experience and familiarity with teaching in multiple music classroom contexts to interpret and make sense of the data.

Due to the intimate nature of portraiture, the relationship between researcher and participant must be carefully constructed and guarded. Since I had prior rapport with each participant in this study, it was especially important that I represent these relationships accurately and ethically through the narrative that I created. In portraiture, as in much qualitative research, the researcher must uphold and protect boundaries between herself and her participants. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain the importance of a researcher-participant relationship based on collaboration and the “co-construction” (p. 160) of the final narrative. With this in mind, it was especially important for me to acknowledge biases and try to eliminate any personal agendas I may have had prior to beginning data collection. Additional details about my relationships with the four participants in this study and my own biases are discussed later in this chapter in the section labeled “Conceptual Framework.”

Analysis and reporting of findings in portraiture are framed by elements commonly found in other forms of qualitative research. In a conceptual paper examining portraiture in educational research, Brooks (2017) explained that although portraiture is deeply rooted in ethnography, it is distinctly related to phenomenology as it seeks to describe and represent lived experiences. In relation to analysis, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated that the process should be both iterative and generative (p. 185). It is important for the researcher to have an idea of possible themes drawn from previous literature and experience before beginning data collection, but the researcher must also remain open to modifying and adapting themes relative to the specific
settings into which they enter. This phase is very similar to other qualitative analysis methods and will be further outlined in the section of this chapter titled “Data Analysis.”

The final central element of portraiture is the “aesthetic whole,” in which findings are presented as a cohesive story that draws upon both the researcher and participant perspectives.

In developing the aesthetic whole we come face to face with the tensions inherent in blending art and science, analysis and narrative, description and interpretation, structure and texture. We are reminded of the dual motivations guiding portraiture: to inform and inspire, to document and transform, to speak to the head and to the heart. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 243)

When constructing the aesthetic whole, the researcher must carefully weave together elements that contribute to the principal story or concept that has emerged from the data. Structure, form, and coherence should be considered when framing the narrative. It is during this phase when empirical and aesthetic features unite to create the definitive portrait.

A distinct and defining feature of portraiture is its orientation toward “goodness.” Although the term “goodness” may seem to indicate that portraiture focuses solely on positive or idealized outcomes, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) are quick to note this is not the intention of portraiture. Rather, portraiture seeks to reach beyond the documentation of problems and search for solutions found in traditional social science research.

Rather than focusing on the identification of weakness, we begin by asking What is happening here, what is working, and why? But in focusing on what works, on underscoring what is healthy and strong, we inevitably see the dark shadows of compromise, inhibition, and imperfection that distort the success and weaken the achievements. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 142)

Through this study, I sought to understand the professional lives and work of four experienced music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts. Keeping the notion of goodness at the forefront of my data analysis, I have presented a holistic view of each
participant’s unique situation while simultaneously embracing “imperfection and vulnerability” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 142).

**Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study, as qualitative methodologies emphasize “in-depth understanding of specific cases: information-rich cases” (Patton, 2015, p. 53, emphasis in original). Specifically, I employed intensity sampling as it “consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)” (Patton, 2015, p. 279). To avoid unusual or distinct cases that may not produce useful information, “intensity sampling involves some prior information and considerable judgment” (Patton, 2015, p. 279). My prior rapport with each participant, discussed later in this chapter, and my researcher expertise contributed to my ability to choose participants who met the criteria of intensity sampling techniques.

Criteria for being considered an “intensity case” included teacher experience, the diversity of their daily class schedules, and the settings in which they teach. I chose two male and two female music educators representing urban, suburban, and rural settings, and each teaches multiple music subjects and multiple ages of students during the course of one school day. Table 1 displays a brief overview of each participant with more detailed profiles provided in the following portraiture chapter. Photographs of participants’ classrooms can be found in Appendix A.
# Table 1

## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music Educator</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years at Current Position</th>
<th>Demographic of School</th>
<th>Classes Taught in Current Teaching Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britney</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Five High School Jazz Bands (mixed grades 9-12), High School Orchestra assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Two combined 7th/8th grade Bands, 7th/8th grade Percussion class, two combined 7th/8th grade Exploring Music classes, 7th/8th grade Choir assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Mix of Rural and Suburban</td>
<td>Middle School Band (6th – 8th), High School Band (9th – 12th), Bucket Drumming/Music History (8th), High School Guitar (9th – 12th)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>General Music (K - 6th), Choir (7th – 12th)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Music educator names and school names have been changed to protect anonymity.*

The following figures and tables provide compelling details about the complexity of each participant’s teaching contexts and include licensure, career overview, and current daily teaching schedules. Tables and figures are organized by participant: Britney, Tom, Jeremy, and Molly.

## Figure 4

*Britney’s Licensure*

### Subject Areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area: Action:</th>
<th>Issue: Expires</th>
<th>Preparation: Gradation:</th>
<th>Validity: Competency:</th>
<th>Basis: Intern:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music: Choral, General And Instrumental Professionalize</td>
<td>5/26/2015</td>
<td>All Grade</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Rules 46-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music: Choral, General And Instrumental Renewal</td>
<td>4/19/2010</td>
<td>All Grade</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Rules 46-47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Figure obtained from the state Department of Education website Licensing Verification and Information System. The specific website details have been redacted to protect participant anonymity.*
Table 2

Britney’s Career Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Courses Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>6th Grade General Music; 6th Grade Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>7th Grade Band; 8th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Color Guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>6th Grade Choir; 6th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Jazz Band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2011</td>
<td>6th Grade Choir; 6th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Jazz Band; HS Music History/Appreciation; HS Music Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>6th Grade Choir; 6th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Jazz Band; HS Piano Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2014</td>
<td>6th Grade Choir; 6th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Jazz Band 1 &amp; 2; HS Music History/Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Freshman Band; Freshman Jazz Band; HS Concert Band; HS Jazz Band 1 &amp; 2; HS Music History/Appreciation; HS Study Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>Freshman Band; HS Jazz Band 1, 2, 3, &amp; 4; HS Percussion Class; HS Study Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>HS Jazz Band 1, 2, 3, &amp; 4; HS Advanced Orchestra; HS Guitar Class; HS Study Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-present</td>
<td>HS Jazz Band 1, 2, 3, 4, &amp; 5; HS Advanced Orchestra (Assistant); HS Study Hall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Britney’s Daily Teaching Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Black Day Course</th>
<th>Gold Day Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:40-10:10</td>
<td>Jazz 1</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(90 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:17-11:47</td>
<td>Jazz 3</td>
<td>Jazz 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(90 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:54-1:33</td>
<td>Jazz 2</td>
<td>Jazz 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(99 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:33-2:03</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(30 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:10-3:40</td>
<td>Prep</td>
<td>Study Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(90 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Britney’s block schedule rotates every other day.
Figure 5

Tom’s Licensure

**Subject Areas:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area: Action</th>
<th>Issue: Expire</th>
<th>Preparation: Gradation</th>
<th>Validity: Competency</th>
<th>Basis: Intern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music: Choral, General And Instrumental Professionalize</td>
<td>5/26/2015</td>
<td>All Grade</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Rules 46-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music: Choral, General And Instrumental Renewal</td>
<td>5/26/2025</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>All Grade Area Major</td>
<td>Rules 46-47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Figure obtained from the state Department of Education website Licensing Verification and Information System. The specific website details have been redacted to protect participant anonymity.

Table 4

Tom’s Career Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Courses Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-1999</td>
<td>6th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Jazz Band; HS Marching Band (extracurricular?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2010</td>
<td>6th Grade Band; 7th Grade Band; 8th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Music History; HS Music Theory; HS Percussion Ensemble; HS Steel Drum Ensemble;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2018</td>
<td>6th Grade Band; 7th Grade Band; 8th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; HS Percussion Ensemble; HS Steel Drum Ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>6th Grade Band; 7th Grade Band; 8th Grade Band; HS Steel Drum Ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-present</td>
<td>7th/8th Grade Band; 7th/8th Grade General Music/World Music; 7th/8th Grade Percussion Techniques; 7th/8th Grade Choir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Tom’s Daily Teaching Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>8:15-8:35 (20 minutes)</td>
<td>Homeroom/Announcements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8:35-9:26 (51 minutes)</td>
<td>7th/8th Grade General Music/World Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9:30-10:21 (21 minutes)</td>
<td>Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10:25-11:16 (51 minutes)</td>
<td>7th/8th Grade Percussion Techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11:20-12:11 (51 minutes)</td>
<td>7th/8th Grade General Music/World Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>12:15-12:45 (30 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12:49-1:40 (51 minutes)</td>
<td>7th/8th Grade Choir (Assistant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1:44-2:35 (51 minutes)</td>
<td>7th/8th Grade Band (for those with 1-2 years of playing experience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2:39-3:30 (51 minutes)</td>
<td>7th/8th Grade Band (for those who didn’t start in 6th grade)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6

Jeremy’s Licensure

**Subject Areas:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area: Action:</th>
<th>Issue: Expire:</th>
<th>Preparation: Gradation:</th>
<th>Validity: Competency:</th>
<th>Basis: Intern:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music: Instrumental Professionalize</td>
<td>5/21/2019</td>
<td>All Grade</td>
<td>K-12</td>
<td>Rules 46-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal and General Music Professionalize</td>
<td>5/21/2019</td>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>P-12</td>
<td>REPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal and General Music Renewal</td>
<td>6/13/2014</td>
<td>Proficient Practitioner</td>
<td>P-12</td>
<td>REPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal and General Music Addition</td>
<td>3/2/2012</td>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>P-12</td>
<td>REPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Figure obtained from the state Department of Education website Licensing Verification and Information System. The specific website details have been redacted to protect participant anonymity.

Table 6

Jeremy’s Career Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Courses Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-2018</td>
<td>6th Grade Band; MS General Music; 7th/8th Grade Band; HS Concert Band; Student Resource Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-2020</td>
<td>6th Grade Band; 7th Grade Band; 8th Grade Band; 8th Grade General Music; HS Concert Band; HS Intro to Guitar; HS Music History; HS Choir; Student Resource Time; Extra Curricular HS Jazz Band; After School Drumline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-present</td>
<td>6th Grade Band; 7th Grade Band; 8th Grade Band; 8th Grade General Music; HS Concert Band; HS Intro to Guitar; Student Resource Time; Extra Curricular HS Jazz Band; After School Drumline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7:45-8:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(49 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8:38-9:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9:29-10:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10:20-11:07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11:11-11:58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12:32-1:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1:23-2:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRT</td>
<td>2:14-2:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(29 minutes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7

Molly’s Licensure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Areas:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area: Action:</td>
<td>Issue: Expire:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental and General Music Renewal</td>
<td>5/6/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal and General Music Renewal</td>
<td>5/6/2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental and General Music Conversion</td>
<td>5/26/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal and General Music Conversion</td>
<td>5/26/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental and General Music Original</td>
<td>5/7/2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal and General Music Original</td>
<td>5/7/2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figure obtained from the state Department of Education website Licensing Verification and Information System. The specific website details have been redacted to protect participant anonymity.

Table 8

Molly’s Career Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Courses Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014-2016</td>
<td>6th Grade Choir; 6th Grade Exploratory Music; 7th Grade Choir; 7th Grade Exploratory Music; 8th Grade Choir; 8th Grade Exploratory Music; 8th Grade Band; Extracurricular 6th-8th Grade Show Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-present</td>
<td>7th Grade Choir; 8th Grade Choir; High School Choir; Kindergarten, 1st 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Grade General Music; Extracurricular 3rd through 6th Grade Choir; Extra Curricular 3rd through 6th Grade Chime Ensemble</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table 9

**Molly’s Daily Teaching Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No CRT</td>
<td>CRT (Prep) 8:10-8:38 (28 minutes)</td>
<td>CRT (Prep) 8:10-8:38 (28 minutes)</td>
<td>CRT (Prep) 8:10-8:38 (28 minutes)</td>
<td>CRT (Prep) 8:10-8:38 (28 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHS Choir Room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High School Choir 8:10-9:00 (50 minutes)</td>
<td>High School Choir 8:42-9:26 (44 minutes)</td>
<td>High School Choir 8:10-9:00 (50 minutes)</td>
<td>High School Choir 8:42-9:26 (44 minutes)</td>
<td>High School Choir 8:42-9:26 (44 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHS Choir Room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7th Grade Choir 9:04-9:56 (52 minutes)</td>
<td>7th Grade Choir 9:30-10:16 (46 minutes)</td>
<td>7th Grade Choir 9:04-9:56 (52 minutes)</td>
<td>7th Grade Choir 9:30-10:16 (46 minutes)</td>
<td>7th Grade Choir 9:30-10:16 (46 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHS Choir Room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8th Grade Choir 10:00-10:50 (50 minutes)</td>
<td>8th Grade Choir 10:20-11:04 (44 minutes)</td>
<td>8th Grade Choir 10:00-10:50 (50 minutes)</td>
<td>8th Grade Choir 10:20-11:04 (44 minutes)</td>
<td>8th Grade Choir 10:20-11:04 (44 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:50 or 11:30 or 11:30</td>
<td>Prep (40 minutes)</td>
<td>Prep (26 minutes)</td>
<td>Prep (40 minutes)</td>
<td>Prep (26 minutes)</td>
<td>Prep (26 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:30 or 11:04</td>
<td>Lunch (30 minutes)</td>
<td>Lunch (30 minutes)</td>
<td>Lunch (30 minutes)</td>
<td>Lunch (30 minutes)</td>
<td>Lunch (30 minutes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES Music Room</td>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>12:40 (40 minutes)</td>
<td>1st Grade (A)</td>
<td>1st Grade (B)</td>
<td>1st Grade (C)</td>
<td>Kindergarten (B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES Music Room</td>
<td>12:45</td>
<td>1:25 (40 minutes)</td>
<td>2nd Grade (A)</td>
<td>3rd Grade (A)</td>
<td>2nd Grade (B)</td>
<td>3rd Grade (B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES Music Room</td>
<td>1:30</td>
<td>2:10 (40 minutes)</td>
<td>4th Grade (A)</td>
<td>4th Grade (B)</td>
<td>Kindergarten (A)</td>
<td>3rd Grade (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES Music Room</td>
<td>2:14</td>
<td>2:49 (35 minutes)</td>
<td>6th Grade A)</td>
<td>5th Grade (A)</td>
<td>5th Grade (B)</td>
<td>4th Grade (C)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Rapport

The participants in this study were purposefully selected because of our previously established relationships. In this section, I detail my prior experiences with each participant to provide context and expose potential biases. Aside from Britney, who attended a university outside of the state where she currently lives and works, all participants and I have taught or continue to teach in the same state where we attended college and have a wide, shared network of music education experiences, colleagues, and acquaintances.

Although Britney attended a different university than I and the other participants, we were introduced through a mutual friend who worked with her high school marching band. I filled in as Britney’s marching band front ensemble instructor for a few weeks one summer and continued to work with the marching band and indoor percussion ensemble for several of the following seasons. Britney and I received a grant to travel and study jazz music together for 28 days one summer, and we have remained in close contact since that experience over a decade ago. We have traveled together a few other times and have seen each other at numeros jazz festivals throughout the state, and Britney has been a guest speaker in the undergraduate band methods course I teach. We also maintain close contact through social media and phone. I chose Britney as a participant for this study because I have followed her successes as a music educator and know her well.

Tom and I attended the same university for our music education degrees, but he graduated about 10 years before me. We are both percussionists and had the same applied studio faculty member at the university despite being there at different times. It was through this teacher that I was introduced to Tom, as he called during one of my private lessons looking for someone to work with the percussion section of his high school marching band. Although I had no prior
experience with marching band other than my involvement at the university level, I accepted the job offer because I needed more time working with students and it felt like a good fit. I worked with Tom and the marching band, as well as the high school indoor percussion ensemble, for two years and then decided to student teach with him. After I completed student teaching, I became employed as a music teacher in the county next to where Tom works, and we continued to see each other frequently at music education events. We talk almost every week and share many stories about teaching and life, and he still serves as a mentor to me. Tom was an obvious choice for participation in this study, as I know him well and have observed him teaching many times.

I have known Jeremy the longest of the four participants in this study; however, we have had the least amount of contact over the past two decades. Jeremy and I attended the same university for our undergraduate degrees in music education, but we both began with different majors and were in different applied instrument studios, so our paths did not cross much until later in the program. We were in university ensembles, music education courses, fieldwork, and extracurricular activities on and off campus together and had a shared circle of friends in the school of music. As we went our separate ways after graduation, we maintained intermittent contact through social media. However, Jeremy teaches in the northern part of the state, and I remained in the same city where we attended college together, so our in-person interactions were nearly non-existent. When I began looking for potential participants for this study, I contacted members of a social media group chat that included many music teachers I had gone to school with, and Jeremy responded. It was only then that we began talking more in-depth.

Molly graduated from the same university and music education program approximately 10 years after Jeremy and me and completed her student teaching internship with another music teacher in the school district where I was employed as a music educator. Although she did not
work directly with me, Molly and I interacted daily while she was student teaching and we saw each other outside of the school day at various musical and social gatherings. Upon graduation, we maintained infrequent contact even though we worked and lived in the same county. Since Molly teaches choir and elementary general music and I primarily taught middle and high school band, our music education circles did not intersect very often. I contacted Molly for participation in this study upon the recommendation of one of my former colleagues who knows her well.

In any situation where participants are being interviewed, observed, or asked to reveal information that may elicit uncomfortable or vulnerable feelings, power imbalances may occur (Creswell, 2014). In relation to observation, a type of data in the present study, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated, “Gaining entry into a site begins with gaining the confidence and permission of those who can approve the activity” (p. 142). It was my hope that in having already established rapport with the participants prior to the start of this study, we were able to lessen power imbalances as well as any potential, unintentional, or perceived trust concerns. Although I had prior rapport with each participant in this study, it is important to also recognize that these relationships may have other, possibly adverse effects on the data. Particularly, participants may have chosen to withhold information if they felt it could cast a negative light on themselves, their program, colleagues, or administration since I know and have worked closely with many of these stakeholders.

Conceptual Framework

Qualitative inquiry often begins with a researcher’s curiosity and desire to answer questions about her field of study. Within music education, Scheib (2014) noted that although researchers must approach these curiosities with a plan of action, there seems to be confusion and ambiguity concerning the use of theory in qualitative research as the terms theoretical
framework and conceptual framework are often used interchangeably in music education and the social sciences at large. For the purposes of this study, I have found Ravitch and Riggan’s (2017) definition of conceptual framework to be the most appropriate and holistic. They stated that a conceptual framework consists of the following separate but related parts:

1. **personal interests and goals** which “reflect your curiosity, passions, beliefs about the world, values about what questions need answering, and working theories about how things work”
2. **identity and positionality**, or “your own curiosities, biases, and ideological commitments, theories of action, and epistemological assumptions”
3. **a literature review** “through which you survey what is known about a given topic, how that topic has been investigated, and the intellectual and analytic tools that might help you to understand it better” (pp. 9-10)
4. **topical research** “that has focused on the subject in which you are interested”
5. **theoretical frameworks** which are “formal theories; those that emerge from and have been explored using empirical work.” (pp. 9-10)

Ravitch and Riggan (2017) described conceptual frameworks as integrative (p. 12), meaning that despite the necessity of a well-planned course of action when beginning, qualitative research likely will evolve as the study progresses:

Your conceptual framework will change during the course of your study, both because the information you gather will lead to new ideas and understanding, and because the process of doing this may lead you to become aware of, or question, parts of your previous conceptual framework. (Maxwell, 2012, as cited in Ravitch & Riggan, 2017)

I veered away from the theoretical framework of adaptive expertise as I realized through discussions with my committee members that narrowing the lens through which I was viewing my study limited my ability to observe my participants objectively and openly. As I collected data throughout the study, I continued to recognize and reaffirm that what interested me the most was understanding the “work” of experienced teachers, hearing their personal stories, and learning about key elements of their professional lives that contribute to successful teaching in multiple music classroom contexts.
Following Ravitch and Riggan’s (2017) approach, Chapter II contained the literature review which includes topical research that initially informed and framed the study. The following section outlines my personal interests, goals, identity, and positionality, which I call my “Personal Framework,” and the theoretical framework that shaped the initial design of this study.

**Personal Framework**

My interest in this study stemmed from 12 years of experience as a public-school music educator working in multiple music classroom contexts. Prior to beginning my doctoral studies, I taught at a middle and high school in a rural community where my schedule was never the same from year to year. I taught every music class that was offered at both schools, as well as some non-music courses, during my tenure in the school district. These courses included concert band, jazz band, choir, general music, music theory, music history, music appreciation, citizenship, study hall, and remedial English. Due to the variety of courses and various age levels of my students, I had to learn to navigate teaching outside of my comfort zone on more than one occasion. This often meant taking knowledge I had gained as an instrumental music education major and figuring out how to apply common educational or pedagogical concepts across various music, and sometimes even non-music, subjects.

As I progressed through the doctoral degree, I became increasingly interested in music teacher degree programs, licensure, specialization, and what I labeled as “teaching outside of specialty.” I constantly drew from my own experiences both in my undergraduate teacher education program and my teaching experience to guide my research and writing. In qualitative research, the researcher is the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, it is important to position myself as such for this study to orient the
reader and bring to light the understanding and experiences I will contribute to this research. I have familiarized myself with qualitative methods and data collection in previous studies and gained experience using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software in my first qualitative work. This section will detail my expertise in each area of data collection used for this study.

The data set for this study included individual interviews, observations, stimulated recall, and photographs. A previous qualitative study I conducted utilized individual interviews and a focus group interview, both of which were semi-structured. After initial interviews with each participant were completed, additional questions for subsequent interviews were derived from the preliminary data analysis which was similar to methods I used in this study. Additionally, I have several years’ experience observing student teachers and their mentor teachers during three years of doctoral study as well as while hosting my own student teachers and other preservice teachers throughout my career as a middle and high school music educator.

Like the participants in this study, I taught in multiple music classroom contexts during my music education career. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) stated, “With portraiture, the person of the researcher – even when vigorously controlled – is more evident and more visible than in any other research form” (p. 13). While it is not necessarily expected that researchers using portraiture have prior relationships with or even similar experiences as their participants, these relationships combined with my personal connection as someone who also experienced work in similar contexts had a profound effect on how this study unfolded. Given these shared experiences, I was able to draw upon my own knowledge and understandings to help interpret the data in this study. Additionally, my teaching experience strengthened my ability to be an
astute observer during data collection which allowed for more accurate and objective information gathering.

**Theoretical Framework**

In the development of this study, the notion of adaptive expertise guided me as a theoretical framework for the proposal decisions. As I brainstormed ideas for research, I was drawn to studies that explored how experienced teachers navigate the challenges of working in varied classroom contexts and what types of adaptations they make as they encounter unanticipated disruptions or changes within separate class periods and from day to day. After reviewing past literature, I developed a set of a priori codes that I thought might guide my data collection while also remaining open to other themes and ideas that could be generated from observations and interviews.

Discussions stemming from my dissertation proposal meeting helped me recognize that I was not going to be able to describe adaptive expertise in the professional lives and work of experienced music teachers in this study in the way I anticipated I might, and how I had seen adaptive expertise described in past literature. By narrowing my focus to the singular phenomena of adaptive expertise and using a priori codes from past studies, it became clear that I was limiting my ability to describe and interpret the lived experiences of each of my participants in their unique multiple music classroom contexts, which was at the core of what I was seeking to understand. The notion of adaptative expertise still guided the formation of interview protocols and observations, but it was no longer the prevailing focus of analysis or description of findings.
Data Collection

Individual Interviews

At the start of the school year in August and September of 2021, I conducted one semi-structured, formal interview with each participant to gather background information about their teaching experience, school, courses taught, planning and instructional strategies, and their initial thoughts about their “work” (see Appendix B for sample interview questions). Each interview was conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one and a half hours. Audio and visual data were recorded using the Zoom platform and saved to my personal laptop, and an audio-only backup recording was stored on my personal iPhone using the Voice Memo application. I also stored this data on an external flash drive.

Observations

While interviews provided participant perspectives, observations allowed me to put those perspectives into context. Although observation may be seen as a subjective means of gathering data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), my researcher expertise and outside perspective allowed me to view participants through a more critical and objective lens. After conducting the initial interviews, I shadowed each teacher throughout their entire school day for one day. Entire school day observations rather than shorter, one or two class period visits allowed me to study participants across all classes they teach during one school day, contributing to a more holistic view of their experience in various music classroom contexts. During each observation, I took notes on my personal laptop and recorded details about the physical classroom environment, student and teacher interactions, and other items I thought might be useful to record such as the number of students in each class. I also recorded my perceptions of the events that I observed.
and connections I made across the school day. Data were stored on my personal laptop as well as on an external flash drive.

Photographs

During each observation, I used my phone to take digital photographs of participants’ classrooms to assist me in writing details about the classroom contexts at a later time. The photographs included images of each classroom, décor, or classroom materials I found to be of particular interest, and anything I perceived as unique to the participant or his or her setting. I also attempted to take a large-scale overview photograph of each classroom, although this proved to be difficult given the size of the classrooms and the limited capabilities of the camera on my phone. I used some of these photographs in the participant portraits in Chapter IV to draw the reader into the context about which I was writing. Photos were stored on my personal iPhone, laptop, and an external flash drive.

Stimulated Recall

Schachter and Freeman (2020) “argue that focusing on the connections between public actions and private reasoning is critical to more fully understanding teaching” (p. 2). Stimulated recall is a method of data collection that strives to bridge the gap between observation of teaching actions and the reasoning behind the choices made during those actions. The ways in which stimulated recall may be conducted can vary greatly depending on the research goals. To prepare for the stimulated recall in this study, I asked participants to order their classes using three prompts during the final moments of the initial individual interviews. The prompts, which were answered solely from the participant viewpoint and with no further explanation or input from my own perspective, were: a) most to least amount of work for the participant; b) most to
least interesting classes for a researcher to study; and c) most to least fun for the participant to teach. This activity helped participants choose the two classes they were interested in discussing during the stimulated recall episodes by allowing them to think more in depth about their classes and the insight that may be gathered from them. Participant answers to each prompt can be found in Appendix C.

Two stimulated recall episodes for each participant were used for this study. Participants recorded two different classes using either their personal laptop or phone and the stimulated recall was scheduled for a day or two after the recording to avoid too much time passing between. A Zoom meeting was used to conduct each stimulated recall, during which participants shared their screens and we viewed the videos together. Participants were asked to keep the recording’s timestamp visible throughout the video viewing and to stop their video at each 5-minute interval. Then, participants were asked to explain what was happening at the moment the video was stopped. Occasionally, I asked participants to clarify something I had seen or something they said when the video was stopped. Participants and I took notes during the viewing and at the conclusion of the video I asked participants if there was anything else they would like to share about the class in general or that class period more specifically. Finally, I asked a few follow-up questions for clarification. I was careful to avoid allowing the stimulated recall episodes to become too much like interviews, as that would negate the purpose and effectiveness of the participant-directed responses. Each stimulated recall episode lasted approximately one and a half to two hours as determined by the length of the teacher’s classes. Our Zoom meetings were recorded and stored on my personal laptop and an external flash drive.
Timeline

Initial contact was made with potential participants via email during the summer of 2021 to explain the study and their role in the project. Institutional Review Board approval was granted in July 2021 (see Appendix D), and a consent form was emailed to each participant who agreed to take part in the study. Once consent forms were signed and returned to me, individual interviews with each participant were scheduled and took place at the start of the school year in August and September 2021. Observations were conducted after the interviews had been completed. The first stimulated recall episodes were scheduled during the initial interview but took place after the observations, and the second stimulated recall episodes occurred within one to three weeks of the first episodes.

The interviews, observations, and stimulated recall episodes were purposefully arranged to occur in that particular order so that I could gather contextual information prior to watching the participants teach. The interviews provided insight about the participants’ music education backgrounds, school settings and students, planning methods, and their vision for music education which prepared me for the observations and informed my notetaking. Subsequent stimulated recall episodes then added to the previously established data set by circling back to the participants’ viewpoints about the work of teaching. See Table 10 for an outline of the study timeline.
Table 10

Timeline

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<tr>
<td>Made initial contact with participants, gained consent to participate</td>
<td>Conducted individual interviews, observations, photographs, and stimulated recall episodes</td>
<td>Performed analysis and interpretation of data</td>
<td>Conducted member checks, made final edits to document</td>
<td>Defended completed study</td>
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It is important to note that this study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, which began to impact public schools in the United States during the spring of 2020. As data collection started in the fall of 2021, some schools I engaged with had stricter Covid-19 protocols than others such as social distancing and requiring everyone in the building to wear masks or face coverings. It was important that I was respectful of these arrangements and remained flexible as the virus seemed to be ever-changing with much uncertainty surrounding possible impacts on the day-to-day functioning of public schools. Therefore, I limited my time in school buildings to one full day of observation and conducted interviews and stimulated recall episodes via Zoom.

Additionally, all participants in this study were not able to meet with their students in person for all or most of the 2020-2021 school year due to the highly contagious nature of the Covid-19 virus. Classes were held virtually and presented challenges for participants as traditional performing arts courses are difficult to conduct on online platforms. All participants in this study discussed the impacts of Covid-19 on their course enrollment and how they felt students were behind due to having music instruction online rather than in person. These educators were not able to provide traditional music ensemble instruction virtually, and no
concerts were held during the 2020-2021 school year. Participants who taught beginning band mentioned that they basically had to start over with those students when in-person classes resumed due to lacking the ability to work with individuals and provide the same type of in-depth instruction they normally would in an in-person classroom setting. Although the music educators in this study were all meeting in person when I began data collection, they all relayed they were still feeling the impacts of not having regular classes the previous year and it was clear that there were some doubts about how long it would take for students and ensembles to truly feel as though they had returned to pre-Covid-19 status. While I did not report on the effects of Covid-19 as a main theme in this study, I did include some of the more pertinent information participants shared with me.

Data Analysis

Portraiture requires flexibility of design and is similar in many ways to other types of qualitative analysis. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) cite drawing inspiration from Miles and Huberman (1994) for coding; Marshall and Rossman (1989) for “adaptive, malleable research design that is key to qualitative inquiry;” Glaser and Strauss (1967) for constant comparative method; Miles and Huberman (1994) for memoing; Goetz and LeCompte (1984) for ethnographic analysis techniques such as searching for emerging patterns; and Gilligan et al. (1989) for voice-centered, interpretive analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, pp. 188-189).

During the data analysis phase, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest embracing the notion of “generative tension” (p. 192), stating:

In designing our method, we sought to hold and represent the sense of tension that people often convey, and also to record the complexity of the narratives in order to capture the situational, the personal, and the cultural dimensions of psychic life, including language
and voice, perspectives and visions, and the relationships between the reader’s and the narrator’s ways of seeing and speaking. (pp. 95-96)

When analyzing data, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) suggest that the portraitist not attempt to privilege one type of tension over the other, but rather to allow the stability of coding, classification, and organization to merge with the instability of participant realities. The portraitist should analyze data using a set of five criteria: repetitive phrases; metaphors; lines of continuity and coherence; triangulation; and patterns (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 193).

A two-step analysis process occurred during this study in which I first created individual participant portraits and then looked across the portraits to find larger themes. The first step began in August 2021 after individual interviews occurred with each participant. Although at times data collection overlapped between participants, the overall order of data collection for each music teacher remained the same and was essential in the data analysis process. In qualitative studies, analysis should be ongoing during data collection as this allows for both collection and analysis to be “recursive and dynamic” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 195). Interviews and stimulated recall episodes were transcribed in Microsoft Word within a few days of completion, and I used the comment feature to annotate the transcriptions as I worked, marking patterns of speech, repeated words or phrases, or other language I perceived to be interesting or unique.

Once all data for one participant was collected, I printed a hard copy for each individual and complied a comprehensive data set which I read through a second time. I then took notes directly on the hard copies of each data set and used the participant’s own words to create preliminary codes using an inductive process called In Vivo Coding. This type of coding allows the researcher to draw “from the participant’s own language for codes” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 129). I
found this method of coding to be fitting as Saldaña suggests it is particularly useful in “studies that prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p. 138) and can provide “imagery, symbols, and metaphors for rich category, theme, and concept development” (p. 141). I was also careful to keep track of connections I made with my own experiences so that I could weave my voice and perspective into the portraits.

I imported all interview, observation, and stimulated recall data into Dedoose, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software program, which allowed me to organize data and codes in a more efficient manner for quicker access and review throughout analysis. I read through each participant’s data set a third time, further collapsing the preliminary codes into larger, overarching categories, and chose to write one participant’s portrait at a time structured around the three categories of “setting the scene,” “professional life and work,” and “successes and challenges.” This helped me better organize the data and maintain a sense of continuity between each participant’s narrative.

After each portrait was assembled, I created a list of themes that emerged as commonalities within most or all of the participants’ stories. These broad themes were further collapsed into more concentrated generalizations in response to the research question and what might be considered the key elements of the work of teachers in this study. These themes, along with discussion, can be found in Chapter V.

**Trustworthiness**

To address trustworthiness for this study I used triangulation, member checks, researcher reflexivity, peer review, and audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The following sections detail how I addressed each of these during data collection and analysis.
**Triangulation**

Collecting data at multiple points throughout the study as well as using various “sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) contributed to increasing the credibility and internal validity of this study. Four different types of data were collected: individual interviews, observations, photographs, and stimulated recall episodes. Individual interviews took place from mid- through late August 2021 and were used to provide context to the observations which occurred from late August through mid-September 2021. I took photographs of participants’ classrooms during the observations to provide a visual representation and add to the reader’s understanding of the physical spaces I described in the portraits. Finally, two stimulated recall episodes per participant occurred from the end of September through early November 2021. Triangulation also occurred within and across participant data sets to cross-check “the consistency in overall patterns of data from different sources or reasonable explanations for differences in data from divergent sources” (Patton, 2015, p. 662).

**Member Checks**

Analysis and interpretations of data were shared with participants in early July 2022 to ensure that I accurately represented their perceptions within the final written document. Some participants offered suggestions or corrected data while others indicated that no changes were necessary. I used participant feedback to update details and interpretations of data in Chapters IV and V during final edits.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

“Critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation” is a key
component of researcher reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259). Situating myself as the researcher in this study required careful consideration in part because of the prior established relationships I had with all four participants. Although these relationships were of varying intensity, it was important that I try to remove as many personal biases and assumptions about the lives and work of each participant as possible prior to beginning data collection.

Lincoln and Guba (1986, as cited in Patton, 2015, p. 725) maintain that objectivity is important for qualitative researchers in establishing trustworthiness “by being balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, multiple experiences, and diverse constructions of realities.” While my 12 years of experience as a music educator teaching across multiple music classroom contexts, much like the participants in this study, allowed me to critically interpret the data collected throughout the project, it was important that I also remain aware of my own personal biases because of this. In an effort to avoid “seeing what I wanted to see” in the data, I was careful to document my personal thoughts, curiosities, and experiences during the study in a separate document and removed from other comments that related to data analysis. I also gave special attention to the ways in which I explained directions for the study and data collection methods and procedures to the participants as an attempt to allow them to see me as a researcher in addition to a previous acquaintance.

**Peer Review**

Ongoing conversations with my dissertation chair, other committee members, and multiple peers and colleagues in the field of music education “regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretation” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259) were part of the peer review for this study. Once I read the completed participant portraits, I realized that I had four very disparate stories. At this point, in trying to
find related themes, I allowed others to read the portraits and had discussions about my initial thoughts and interpretations of the data. These conversations helped solidify the categories I will present in Chapter V.

Audit Trail

“A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259) is considered part of the audit trail when conducting research. Throughout the study, I maintained organized and detailed records of all data on multiple sources of secure media including my personal iPhone, personal laptop, and an external flash drive. All data were timestamped as they were saved, and I kept a detailed, chronological log of IRB approval, data collection, data analysis, and other important steps during the study to increase reliability and credibility.

Organization of Findings

It is common in portraiture studies to create individual chapters devoted to each of the participants; however in this study it was more practical to include all participant portraits in one chapter (Chapter IV) while utilizing a separate chapter (Chapter V) to present themes and discussion that emerged from looking across the portraits as a whole. When writing the portraits, I began with Britney’s profile as I began data collection with her interview and completed her data set first. Britney’s portrait is followed by Tom, Jeremy, and Molly’s portraits.
CHAPTER IV

Individual Participant Portraits

In Chapter IV, individual participant profiles are presented in portraiture form. For ease of reading and continuity between the portraits, each participant’s data is further organized into these subcategories: (a) Setting the Stage, which provides background information and details about each participant’s unique teaching context; (b) Professional Life and Work, which reveals aspects of participants’ current teaching assignments; and (c) Successes and Challenges, which looks at how teachers navigate the multiple music classroom contexts in which they work.

Britney

Setting the Scene

Although I had visited Britney’s school several times over the past decade, the morning I entered my car to drive there for the observation felt quite different than any other trip I had made to the school. This time I wasn’t visiting to work with the marching band or indoor percussion ensemble. Instead, I was beginning the journey toward gaining an understanding of Britney’s professional life and the work that she does daily. It was a particularly warm and sunny morning, standard for the hot summer month of August in the Midwest, and I was tempted to roll down my windows once I pulled onto the interstate. As I headed south, I thought about what I might see when I entered Britney’s classroom. Since this was the first in-person classroom observation I’d been able to take part in for several months due to Covid-19, I was excited to visit Britney’s school.
Britney is well-known in her community and state, and she has accrued an impressive catalogue of accomplishments and awards, primarily in her role as a jazz educator, over the past 17 years. Britney’s “About the Teacher” page on her employer’s website lists several of Britney’s achievements, including receiving a grant to study jazz in 2011, being named the State Jazz Educator of the Year in 2014-2015, and receiving the Teacher of the Year award for her school corporation in 2015. She was also instrumental in creating the state’s All-District Jazz Band in 2015, which remains an annual event. In 2017, Britney was invited to be a guest adjudicator at a jazz festival in Australia, and in 2018 she and another female jazz leader in the state started a chapter of “Jazz Girls Day” to promote jazz for young women interested in pursuing this art. Most recently, she was named as a top 10 finalist for the 2022 Grammy Music Educator Award.

Britney has worked in Northeast Schools during her entire tenure as a public-school educator. The high school where she currently works is situated in the northeastern portion of the city, just outside of the historic downtown area and nestled between older neighborhoods and, somewhat surprisingly, the county jail. During our first interview, Britney commented, “I think I saw something that the mayor just posted on Facebook – we are now the 10th largest city by population in the state, which is crazy” (Interview 1). It’s certainly a suburban area, but, according to Britney:

It’s interesting. We’re in a very affluent county, so you’ll have kids driving Mercedes to school, but we also live across from the jail and from government housing. We’re the county seat where the courthouse is, so we have a lot of poverty as well. So, it’s a really extreme mix of socio-economic, and then we have, I think, more than 40 languages spoken… with refugees and immigrants or people moving here on visas or working. (Interview 1)

The high school is quite large for that part of the state, and class sizes continue to grow. When Britney started working at the school, it was in the top 30 for size in the state and now it’s in the
top 10. “We just got the biggest freshman class, and I think we might be 200 bigger than last year,” Britney remarked (Interview 1).

The school corporation is comprised of 10 school sites. There are seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and the one high school where Britney works, housing about 3,500 students in grades nine through 12. “There’s been a lot of hubbub about doing a second high school because we’re getting so big, but the demographic studies are saying that it’s going to level off” (Interview 1). Britney is skeptical about this, as she mentioned that she feels those studies need to be redone and re-projected since she’s noticed a boom in new housing going up around the city. “But… the community is very much against having two high schools,” she said, because a nearby town split into two high schools and it was “pretty controversial” (Interview 1).

I entered the school and was escorted to Britney’s classroom where I was met with puzzled looks from some of her students as they removed instruments from their cases and set sheet music on stands. The square room was small, about the size of a regular academic classroom, but an appropriate size for a full jazz ensemble. The flat floors were covered in a geometric patterned carpet made of varying shades of gray and the walls were a warm, neutral tan. At the front of the room near the door hung a projector screen, two very large speakers, and a wall-mounted metal cabinet that housed the audio-visual equipment and controls. A computer printer sat on a small metal desk beneath the cabinet and there was a larger, L-shaped wooden desk configuration opposite the printer. This would be my spot for the day.

As I sat down at the desk, I took note of the rest of the room’s layout and the general classroom environment. To my right was a row of tan, metal filing cabinets which contained the jazz music library and a large, metal drum rested on top of them in the corner. Further down the wall were some built-in cabinets with various bags and plastic bins above them. The walls of the
classroom displayed a mixture of personal and school-related items that showcased Britney’s travels as well as photos of her students and memorabilia celebrating their accomplishments. The entire back wall was filled with various award plaques from state organizational festivals and regional jazz festivals. Two large, framed photos of the jazz bands flanked the awards. Other artwork in the room included framed flyers for Northeast’s annual spring jazz show, posters of events at which Britney had performed, and even a signed poster of jazz musician Maynard Ferguson. A large, pendant-shaped banner commemorating Northeast’s success as a 2021 finalist in a national jazz festival sat on a table near the front of the room.

The jazz band seating arrangement was positioned along two of the classroom walls. A small platform lined with black wooden bar stools was pushed up against the back wall and would be where the trumpet section settled once rehearsal began. In front of the platform sat another row of stools for the trombones, and in front of those stools was a row of black chairs for the saxophone section. Each seat had a music stand in front of it. The rhythm section set-up was to the left of the wind section, consisting of a drum set, amplifiers for the bass and guitar, a digital keyboard, congas, bongos, and a vibraphone. As Britney walked into the classroom and greeted me, students took their places for the start of class.

Britney’s “home base” was at the front of the room and she primarily taught from this location although she moved around to work with individual students as needed. Her teaching area consisted of a stool, laptop on a cart with wheels, a music stand, and papers for class in a small paper sorter. Slightly behind this area was a tool chest, table with electric keyboard, and an amplifier. The students began to warm up on their own, and Britney moved to her laptop to begin the day’s instruction.
Professional Life and Work

Britney, a bassist, received a Bachelor of Science in Music Education and a Master of Education from a small, private university in the Midwest. Like many music educators in the United States, she holds an all-grade, all-subject teaching license which means she is certified to teach in multiple music classroom contexts. When describing her job trajectory, Britney stated:

This is my 17th year. But I have just bounced all over the place as far as general music, sixth grade choir, six through 12 band, orchestra… I’ve taught percussion, I’ve taught keyboard classes, guitar class, music theory, history, marching band, pep band, concert band, jazz band. So… all those things. (Interview 1)

Although Britney has always worked in the same school district, she has only been working in her current teaching assignment for five years. Before moving to the high school full-time, she also worked in the sixth-grade building, the now-defunct freshman campus, and a middle school. Britney compared her former role traveling from building to building in the school corporation to being on a road trip. “You can never put down roots, you can never feel settled, you’re almost never on time or not hurrying out of a class, so you can’t even build relationships or help kids with things in between classes” (Interview 1).

The music program at Northeast has taken off over the past several years, and none of the music teachers travel anymore. This rapid growth has also allowed Northeast to offer several music classes that aren’t always accessible in public schools such as guitar, piano, AP music theory, and recording arts. When Britney first joined Northeast Schools, she and one other person covered the entire sixth- through 12th-grade music program and there was only one band each in grades six, seven, and eight, one high school band of grades nine through 12, and one high school jazz band. Now, the high school music department alone consists of eight full-time educators who teach the aforementioned classes as well as eight choirs, three orchestras, and five concert bands. Britney teaches five jazz bands in addition to assisting with the Advanced
Orchestra. When I mentioned to Britney that having five curricular jazz bands is a rarity she replied, “Yeah, we’re very lucky” (Interview 1).

Northeast has block scheduling, which means Britney teaches Jazz One, Jazz Three, Jazz Two, and has a prep period one day, and she assists with the Advanced Orchestra and teaches Jazz Four and Jazz Five before finishing with a study hall the next day. All of Britney’s ensembles consist of mixed grade levels.

In the top bands, usually maybe one sophomore or two sophomores kind of squeak in, and then they get a little bit more mixed for the second band. Same thing with Jazz Three, but then Jazz Four and Five are mostly freshmen. One thing that’s been kind of cool is a lot of seniors are really wanting to take multiple jazz bands just because they have room in their schedules. So, it almost becomes like a side-by-side program in Jazz Four and Five, with kids that are going to All-State and then kids that can barely play their horn. It’s a really interesting kind of mix of levels in those bottom two bands. (Interview 1)

Although Britney is happy to be in one building teaching primarily jazz band all day, she mentioned that it sometimes feels like a double-edged sword. “I’ve never felt like a better teacher than when I started teaching mostly one type of thing in one room in one building,” she said (Interview 1). However, Britney noted that she often feels as though her jazz band classes are perceived as inferior to the concert bands “even though we might play the most sophisticated things… and, you know, it’s America’s indigenous art form” (Interview 1).

When we spoke about what she believes to be the “work” of teaching, I first asked Britney to describe her philosophy or vision for music education. It is very clear that her students’ needs are at the forefront of her planning, but she also prioritizes her own self-improvement as an educator: “We are on this journey together” (Interview 1). Britney, an advocate of growth mindset, noted that she wants to “get better at this craft every year… the more I learn the more I want to be open to learning from the students and make it more of a collaborative classroom” (Interview 1). To Britney, the work of teaching is a combination of
many items. It’s her “vision,” or all the things she wants to accomplish with her students, but it’s also “literally being at the copy machine and getting everything in place so kids can just walk in, and you can just rehearse” (Interview 1). Perhaps most importantly, the work of teaching in Britney’s professional life includes building community, which really shines through in the classroom culture she has established.

When I observed Britney teaching, I immediately noticed the consistency of her classroom routines and procedures. In each class, students entered the room, warmed up on instruments on their own for a bit, and then Britney started playing music loudly over the sound system to signal the official start of class. This year’s tune is “Alright, Okay, You Win” by Count Basie and Joe Williams, an upbeat piece with a repetitive vocal refrain that students all seemed to know quite well, even at the beginning of the school year. Britney told me she chooses a different Count Basie tune every year because “to me that is quintessential… because it’s just so classic” (Stimulated Recall 1). Students immediately got up out of their chairs and began to dance and sing along, moving from side to side and clapping on beats two and four, and then Britney joined along with them.

After the song concluded, the daily routine continued as students sat back down and got ready to play their instruments. The drummer started right in with a swing pattern, Britney counted off, and students played through scale patterns while she took attendance and did administrative work. Students in each class tended to lead themselves through the warm-up sequence while Britney walked around the room, listening to and checking in with students while they played, adjusting stands and seats or looking at their sheet music and providing individual feedback. Students moved into scale competencies, which they played in small groups of mixed instrumentation, while Britney marked grades on her laptop. During one of our stimulated recall
episodes I mentioned that the students almost seemed to be on “autopilot” for a good chunk of
the rehearsal, as she didn’t really have to give much instruction – they just came into the
classroom and started doing the tasks that were expected of them.

Every single day I press play and we’re dancing. We don’t talk, I don’t have to speak to
anyone. After we dance, we go into our Five Minutes a Day, which is more fun for them.
So that is, what, five minutes into class and I’m like hey, good morning, everybody – I
have not spoken to them before that, and to me that is the most important part of my
teaching because I go into other classes that are teaching music and they’re 20 minutes in
and they’re still giving announcements and the kids are like [physically slumps in her
chair and rolls her eyes]. I mean, they’re just dying and I’m like no, that’s not how my
class rolls. (Stimulated Recall 1)

Despite how smoothly the classes seemed to function, the behind the scenes work for
Britney continues from year to year. “Having that routine in all five bands… it’s up to me to keep it fresh
for them, so that’s where my challenge is” (Stimulated Recall 1).

I will generally be very pragmatic about wherever the kids are, wherever they can
achieve, so it’ll go faster in the top groups, it’ll go slower in the lower groups… We still
sort of tier it [scale tests] for the different levels, but we just sort of get through the basics
and modify from them. I don’t continue to test, it’s just a modification that we do in class
just to sort of keep them moving forward within the scales. (Stimulated Recall 1)

Britney mentioned that the older groups often pick up on material much faster than the younger
groups, partly because they are more experienced musicians but also because they are used to the
routine.

I asked Britney to share other routines or ways in which she feels the different levels of
her jazz band classes are similar. “Generally, every band has the same warm-up which we just
modify” (Stimulated Recall 1). She especially varies the ways in which she teaches students to
approach soloing, which is dependent on their skill level and knowledge of jazz vocabulary.
Sometimes students play background parts that section leaders create and other times they listen
to a solo from a recording and try to replicate that. They work on trading fours and musically
communicating with each other using the 12-bar blues form as the vehicle. “We try to keep that
part a little bit fresh each day so that they’re not just like, oh great, the B-flat blues again” (Stimulated Recall 1). Britney also has “improv Wednesdays” where students learn different styles and work on transcribing solos. She often brings in a guest teacher because she feels that “it’s really important for them to hear from a different voice periodically. Because (does a “wah wah wah” noise) I’m just like Charlie Brown’s teacher, you know?” (Stimulated Recall 1).

Once the opening sequence of the daily routine is finished, the class moves into repertoire rehearsal. During my observation I noticed that Britney used quite a bit of questioning while teaching. “Yes, and I am much more intentional about that at the younger levels,” she told me (Stimulated Recall 1). During our first stimulated recall episode, Britney was teaching Jazz One but also had an intermediate piano class visiting that day. She used the jazz band rehearsal to introduce blues and improvisation to the piano students, but she told me the way she taught the concepts that day was generally the same as she would teach them in her beginning jazz band classes. “I don’t explain a lot on the front end because I want them to sort of notice what they’re hearing and then just kind of give some feedback after we’ve done it” (Stimulated Recall 1).

While the jazz curriculum she has developed runs nearly effortlessly from class to class and across different ability levels, Britney continues to learn new strategies and techniques from her own performance experiences, observing other master educators, and attending workshops. Every time you go to a conference, you’re just more reminded of things. Yeah, you get new techniques, but then you’re also reminded of really great ways to not just give your students all the answers, but to ask the questions, too. (Stimulated Recall 2)

Britney recently went to a major jazz festival in Australia and recounted an experience there:

In one of my Australia sessions I watched – I think he’s the Yamaha education head for Australia – he had these amazing sessions, and one of them was just student feedback and questions you asked the students. I wouldn’t say that anything he said was like, “Oh I’ve never thought about that before,” but everything he was saying was like, “Oh… I need to do that again” or “I need to, instead of trying to make rehearsal go as fast as possible and just give them the answers… take the time, ask the questions, or ask them leading
questions like ‘Hey, what do you think about…’ when I ask them about balance.
(Stimulated Recall 2)

For Britney, experiences like these, combined with years of planning and refining curriculum, have contributed to very meaningful music education moments with her students and the community.

**Successes and Challenges**

Britney has worked in the same school district during her entire career as a music educator. However, she has had the most changes in her teaching assignment of all the participants in this study. Britney has had 10 unique teaching assignments during her 17 years of teaching experience, some of which required her to move between buildings and across various grade levels from middle to high school. Her current schedule allows her to be in one place, and even with multiple preps, this has been much better for her than moving from building to building. She feels as though she is able to make stronger connections with her students, take the time to answer questions before and after class, and generally feel more settled rather than constantly rushing from one classroom or building to another.

Britney has somewhat of a rare situation in that she teaches mostly the same subject (jazz band) throughout the entire school day. This allows her to have consistency in instruction since she is the only educator working with the jazz program, and she feels that she has the ability to teach the jazz classes how she prefers. “It’s great that we have the autonomy to teach all the classes so seamlessly” (Interview 1). All of Britney’s classes include mixed grade levels of high school students, and she feels as though she has a better understanding of how to tailor questions and content for different age and ability levels of students since she is experiencing teaching in this manner every day. Being able to work with the same students from year to year as they advance to higher level jazz bands has allowed Britney to build community and a greater
knowledge of her students’ needs and how to best serve them. This has also enabled her to create a consistent routine between each of the classes that helps her streamline her teaching, as students know what to expect in her classroom from year to year and can typically get moving at the start of class on their own. “They have the same experience, and so from year to year to year they're not trying to re-figure out how I’m going to run things. They feel very comfortable, they know the process” (Interview 1).

Prior to settling into her current teaching assignment, Britney spent a considerable number of years moving between buildings and grade levels. The challenges this presented for her included not being able to build relationships with students, not being able to answer questions or offer help before and after class, and never quite feeling settled. Although she currently works only in the high school, she is now figuring out how to navigate finding the right level of classroom management and social-emotional work needed between the different mix of students she has in each class. For example, Britney feels as though her lower-level classes are much less self-motivated and self-directed and therefore need more “teaching,” whereas the advanced students can fly through classroom procedures and lessons much faster.

The pressure on me to not assume that they are understanding… whether they come in with any prior knowledge or understand all my little vocab words and things like that. Just figuring out how to communicate with them, as well as make them good musicians… because I'm learning them. I'm learning their personalities, I'm learning their IEPs… so that's like a whole different set of I don't know these kids yet. So that's a different set of, sort of like, pressure. (Interview 1)

The time of day that the lower-level jazz bands meet also hinders their ability to focus because they must wait until nearly 1:30 in the afternoon to eat lunch as they are on block scheduling and have 90-minute class periods. And, even though Britney has established a consistent routine across all five jazz bands that she teaches, she really has to work to “keep it fresh” (Interview 1)
for students year after year since she regularly sees the same students throughout their entire high school career.

Another main area that presents challenges for Britney in her current context is a lingering sense of unfamiliarity with the material or subject matter that she is teaching. She mentioned several times that she did not have any jazz pedagogy courses during her undergraduate music education degree program, and she has had to seek out information and experiences on her own to educate herself.

I didn't have a single jazz pedagogy class so... I mean... I don't know that anyone prepares them for what they're doing 10 years later. If you're in a growth mindset you're always trying to figure out wait what is that person doing, what are their best practices, and you're always trying to steal their ideas. So, it's been like 17 years of me stealing ideas and going out and trying to find out what's special about this thing happening over here, you know? Maybe college prepared me for that. (Interview 1)

This is a continuing effort by Britney, as she feels she still has much to learn despite the great amount of success she and her students have garnered recently. She also feels a lot of pressure to “get it right” in terms of repertoire selection and resources in the top jazz group so that they can be the most successful. According to Britney, repertoire choice can make or break the ability for some students to really shine and affects the success of the group as a whole. The “work” of doing tasks like making copies or putting materials into the online classroom so everything is ready to go for students when they walk into the classroom each day has presented challenges as well in terms of personal time management and finding appropriate resources. Finally, since she only assists with one orchestra class, Britney mentioned a bit of discomfort in this area and feels as though she’s sometimes learning along with the students as she’s teaching them.

I feel like I'm probably the least comfortable with those kids so far, so it's less predictable, and I feel like I am also like learning them as they're learning me, and they're learning the craft at the same time. (Interview 1)
Despite the challenges Britney faces working in her current teaching context, her orientation toward growth mindset motivates her and her students to continue to learn alongside one another in a collaborative and creative environment.

I haven't figured it out, but I am getting better every year… and we are on this journey together. I try to put myself in situations that I might have a little trepidation about, but then I think, you know what? I ask my students to try new things all the time and so it's really important for me to kind push myself as well to be that example, so that I can have empathy for you guys while you're trying new things and kind of nervous about it. (Interview 1)

Britney’s commitment to being a music-making teacher clearly enhances both professional and personal aspects of her life and helps her remember her “why” in the midst of navigating working in multiple music classrooms contexts.

Tom

Setting the Scene

Driving to Tom’s school for the day-long observation brought fond memories of the semester I student taught with him, as well as the numerous times I traveled back and forth between his city and mine for winter percussion and summer marching band rehearsals. Tom and I have known each other for nearly two decades, and we often share stories of our teaching experiences as well as the occasional humorous meme or photo that reminds us of one another and our teaching experiences. I consider him to be a mentor and friend, and he was instrumental in preparing me for success during the early years of my career.

Tom’s school district is considered urban and consists of one high school with grades nine through 12, one middle school where Tom teaches seventh and eighth grade, one intermediate school with grades five and six, and six elementary schools that provide education to students in grades kindergarten through five. The school district also has a separate school building where the gifted and talented programs are held. When I arrived at the middle school,
Tom met me at a side entrance that opened to a dimly lit access hallway leading directly into his classroom. As we entered, he asked me if I recognized the room from my student teaching days, and I immediately noticed that the small office in the back corner was no longer there. Tom told me that the office area was removed so that band lockers can be installed along the wall, and students will also have new chairs and stands soon. For the time being, neat rows of instrument cases lined the wall while the opposite side of the room housed filing cabinets and a large collection of hand drums that Tom uses for the general music classes. The front of the room contained a bulletin board with student birthdays displayed prominently, a large TV monitor, keyboard, director’s stand and stool, a whiteboard with staff lines, instrument fingering chart posters, two entry doors, and a sheet music folder cabinet. The agenda for each class was written on the whiteboard in black marker, something Tom does each day, so students are aware of class objectives. The room was neat, clean, and organized. Tom’s desk was in the back of the room along with some larger percussion instruments including bass drum and drum set. Around the room were funny memes and sayings, pictures of Tom with his children and former students, and a lot of percussion memorabilia and equipment (Tom is a percussionist). Next to Tom’s desk was a rocking chair where students can sit if they need a personal “time out” or brain break during class. That was my seat for the day.

**Professional Life and Work**

Tom has been a music educator for 27 years. Although he has taught in his current school district for 23 years, he began teaching instrumental music in grades five through 12 further north in the state. He remained in that position for four years before moving to Riley Community Schools, where he currently teaches in a middle school that houses grades seven and eight. Before settling at the middle school, Tom worked primarily at the high school level for many
years. The list of courses he has taught during his time with the Riley school district is quite extensive:

I’ve done concert band – we had three. I did a seven and eight band program, two separate classes for that at one point… music history, music theory… I did general music a couple different years and in a couple different buildings in addition to the high school concert band stuff. I had a fifth-grade general, a sixth-grade general, and then even a kindergarten *(laughs).* I also did steel band for probably 12 of those years, marching band, and jazz band a little bit on and off… a hand drum ensemble, indoor drumline… things like that. *(Interview 1)*

When I student taught with Tom at the high school, he was also working with a remedial math class. We laughed about this as I recalled how I eventually taught a remedial English class during my tenure as a high school music educator.

Tom’s schedule hasn’t been very consistent until recently. The school district went through some building reconfigurations and Tom noted that he was “bouncing around” *(Interview 1)* quite a bit during that time.

I felt frantic, especially the last three years, because I was just running around everywhere. I just felt like I couldn’t focus on much of anything because it was always just running into a building, teaching, and running out to the next one. *(Interview 1)*

All the music teachers in the district had been traveling from building to building for some time, but most of them are now working in just one building. Tom works at the middle school full time where he teaches only mixed grade level courses. He teaches two exploring music classes, a percussion class, two band classes, and he assists with the choir for one period.

I visited on a Friday, and there was a high school football game that evening. The students seemed a bit chatty and unfocused throughout the day, and Tom had a few disciplinary challenges which he handled with a firm, but caring demeanor. First period, an exploratory music class, began with a short advisory period session focused on the question, “How do we create a positive environment at [school name]?” Tom had a discussion with his students, many
of whom were eating breakfast, and they offered suggestions for improving the culture of the school as they interacted with Tom and each other in a respectful manner. Some students entered the classroom late as Tom instructed the class to get out their school-issued laptops, go to the school website, and complete an assignment based on the focus question. “You just got here and I’m hearing your voice a lot,” Tom directed at one student while the others worked quietly in their seats.

Both exploring music classes during periods one and four were structured in a similar fashion and centered around reading and writing music notation through performance on hand drums. In our initial conversation, Tom told me the class is part of a 12-week rotation.

The biggest goal I have for those classes is to keep them engaged in what’s going on, try to keep it interesting. I’m just trying to do a number of different things in there so that the pacing is pretty quick. (Interview 1)

There was very little down time in either class, and Tom moved efficiently from task to task, using a combination of visual and verbal cues when it was time to change to a new concept.

Tom’s main teaching strategies in the exploring music classes included modeling, call and response, and student questioning. Both groups of students seemed to work well together, often listening to one another as they played and applauding for students who answered correctly when writing rhythm patterns on the whiteboard. However, I noticed that period four was much more energetic and talkative than earlier classes, a trend that continued throughout the day.

During our discussions, Tom shared the differences between each of the classes he teaches and some of the benefits and challenges of working with mixed grade level classes. He revealed that as the school day progresses, students become more unruly and chatty. “It wears me out” (Stimulated Recall 2).

A good number of them will be ready to go, ready to play… I just feel like I’m constantly stopping to address that. It’s like, I don’t want to let it go because I don’t want them
thinking that’s ok if they’re not ready to play. It’s a really hard thing for me to balance, sometimes. I want them to have a good time. (Stimulated Recall 2)

Tom mentioned that students are often able to help each other with things like instrument fingerings or other small concepts, and they are able to hold each other accountable in class which can alleviate some of the discipline issues.

The benefit that I feel like I have [with the mixed grade level classes] is that I’ve got eighth grade students in there as well, they’ve been through it, so I try to kind of play on their leadership a little bit. (Stimulated Recall 2)

However, he also noted that there are some big challenges to having seventh- and eighth-grade students in the same class:

You also come across the fact that you have some eighth-grade kids who are mature at times. You have some kids that could probably handle being in high school at that age and then you’ve got some seventh-grade kids who probably have a fifth-grade maturity level at times. That’s a pretty broad spectrum of kids and their lack of control, you know… those are the things that I feel like make it a little bit more challenging sometimes. But if you can turn that around into a positive like with the leadership, I think it’s a decent way to do it. (Stimulated Recall 2)

Overall, Tom feels that being flexible in the classroom has helped him navigate the challenges of teaching multiple music subjects and mixed grade levels all day. “We adjust things and sometimes just let things go because it’s just not working. You pick your battles. It’s not worth the fight” (Stimulated Recall 1).

One theme that permeated our conversations was Tom’s gratitude for what he gets to do each day. “There are a lot of things that excite me about teaching still that make me thankful for what I do” (Interview 1). “The enjoyment level, I think, has changed so much for me, too, because there’s no substitute for being involved in something like what we do” (Interview 1). Tom noted that his vision for music education has evolved over the years into a very student-centered approach to teaching, which has helped him remember why he started teaching and why
he continues. “It’s like, what do these kids want to do that I could teach them something from?”

One thing I’ve noticed with this kind of vision is I have a lot more fun, too” (Interview 1).

This has changed, which I think would be pretty typical from where you started, where you want the ideal ensemble, and you want the ideal this and that… I used to think the kids had to be the best of this and they’ve got to make sure they practice this so that we can play this music… I want them to enjoy it and be really engaged and I want them to have good memories of my classroom. It’s a tough balance sometimes, because you want them to have a good time where it doesn’t get to that chaos level. But they can have fun, and they can focus. (Interview 1)

I noticed that when Tom talked about his vision for music education, he referred to his job as “teaching” rather than “work.” When I asked him what he considered to be the work of teaching, he answered by immediately differentiating the two:

The teaching side for me is enjoyable because I get to interact with these kids, and I mean it’s not always a blast, it’s not always easy, but I get to learn about the kids and we have fun doing that. The work side of it for me is all of the administrative crap, it’s like the red tape that we have to do that… that is work.” (Interview 1)

Tom brought up the word “work” again during one of the stimulated recall episodes. As we sat down to watch the recording of the 7th and 8th grade band class, he started by explaining to me that there was a lot of administrative “work” happening at the start of the video, which, despite all the preparation he does, still takes up a lot of time at the beginning of class.

A lot of pre-rehearsal stuff going on here. You know how it goes, you try to think ahead and plan ahead and you get this piece of music copied and ready to pass out, and then there’s this kid who doesn’t have a trumpet book and someone needs an instrument fixed. (Stimulated Recall 2)

He explained to me that he tries to cover a lot of the big administrative work during summer, such as reorganizing the music library, putting sheet music in folders, and thinking about long-term planning: “I think the biggest focus for me is what we do when we’re getting back for about the first three to four months” (Interview 1). He gets the room ready, sets up chairs and stands,
fills out forms, starts communicating with parents, puts the birthday bulletin board together, and emphasizes making the “kids feel kind of good when they come in” (Interview 1).

One of Tom’s strengths as a teacher is his ability to build positive rapport with his students.

I focus on trying to really build good relationships with kids. I enjoy when they come in. I try to greet every single one of them and I try to do it by name. I start every class with, “Okay how was your day yesterday? Anything exciting happen?” I think that’s a good thing, because kids a lot of times… I mean, I remember how I felt in certain classes where it made me nervous and I’m like, “Don’t call on me!” you know? I think trying to break through to that side of it… I want to know the kids, and that’s a huge benefit to being able to do what I do. (Interview 1)

Tom’s personality is magnetic. He is funny and engaging, and throughout the day students gathered to talk with him at the start and end of class. Topics such as weekend plans, favorite music, and school permeated the conversations. Tom used a lot of positive reinforcement with several groups, and he told me that he’s learned to do that through the years to encourage student participation in class. At one point, I heard him say to a student: “I’m so proud of you for doing the right thing the other day” (Observation).

It was “Fun Sock Friday” the day I visited, and Tom was wearing orange Halloween socks with black bats on them which he showed off in each class. Tom’s use of humor, even in disciplinary situations, helped mitigate some of the stressful circumstances that can often occur in classrooms. For example, Tom had to ask students several times to put away their cell phones during first period while playing hand drums. “Some of you are very talented because you can text and do this at the same time,” he said, laughing and rolling his eyes (Observation). Tom told me if students don’t put their cell phones away when asked, they go into the “box of shame” for the rest of the period. When students didn’t want to stand up to play their drum pads in third period, Tom commented, “Everybody up. I’m old and I’m still standing up” (Observation). A
student exclaimed, “You’re not that old,” to which Tom responded, “Thank you. You get an A for the day” (Observation). In sixth period, Tom reminded students to have someone ready to pick them up after the homecoming game that evening, “Make sure your ride is not grocery shopping in Nebraska or something like that” (Observation). Students in Tom’s classes responded well to the laid-back environment in his classroom and were respectful and attentive.

From an outsider’s perspective, Tom’s classes run like a well-oiled machine, and he has learned, presumably through years of experience, how to handle day-to-day disruptions with efficiency and ease. Tom’s classes are structured around routines and procedures, which help keep the students engaged and knowing what they need to do every step of the way.

I try to live by the whole idea of structure for the kids where it is routine to them, because I noticed – and I start off the year with it – I try to put what we’re doing on the board, even if it’s as general as, for the band classes, we’re going to be working on these pieces and warming up with these scales. I noticed if I don’t, it’s the first thing [they ask]… “What are we doing today, what’s going on?” (Stimulated Recall 1)

Each class also has a daily assignment to complete on their laptops at the start of the period, which helps set the tone and focus for the lesson. These exercises focus primarily on music literacy, and help Tom find “creative ways” of disseminating information to students (Interview 1).

During the band classes at the end of the day, Tom used a number of strategies to help students learn the material. He used the gock block to help students keep time while playing scales at the start of class, and later played parts on the keyboard while students worked out of the method book or read from sheet music. There was a good balance of instruction through modeling and verbal cues, and the students were actively playing their instruments for the majority of the class periods. The overall structure of the band rehearsals followed a typical macro-micro-macro format, and Tom dug into small chunks of repertoire during the middle
portion of class. Many reminders were given about embouchure, air, and other concepts that were being taught through the music such as the difference between solo, soli, and tutti. Because the second class was a beginning band class for students who didn’t begin to play in sixth grade, Tom used much more guidance and chunking than he did in the previous class.

Although he only teaches two band classes in his current position, Tom still self-identifies as a band director. “I think about what drove me to Riley to begin with, what drove me to be here. I’m definitely a band director” (Interview 1). Now that he teaches more general music and choir as well, he says, “My love for all of it was doing the band thing, and now it’s still the same, but I do feel like it’s more broad” (Interview 1). I asked him if he identifies as a musician these days, to which he replied, “The whole musician thing… I mean, I teach lessons, but I don’t feel like I get to play much at all, which is fine” (Interview 1). We discussed how odd it is that we often spend so much time perfecting how to play our instruments as music majors in college, but then don’t do it so much when we enter the teaching field, or it’s at least it’s not the same kind of playing. “With the percussion class, I keep a practice pad. I mean, I play all the rudiments and stuff with them… I’m still hacking through. You know, that muscle memory. Never goes away” (Interview 1).

I asked Tom how self-identifying as a band director shapes his approach to teaching music. Interestingly, his answer was more centered around how being a band director has shaped him as a person as well as how it has helped him plan and approach the work of teaching.

Well, to be honest with you, I really don’t think about it a lot. But I will say, from the band director perspective, I think that that has helped me with not only planning for other classes… I mean, it helps me in terms of planning in how I help with the choir because I think, for what we do dealing with larger numbers of kids and trying to figure out efficient ways to do things… and I think it’s helped me in a lot of different areas that don’t even have to do with teaching, you know? If I’ve got to be somewhere at 6 pm, of course I’m there at 5:45 because that’s the way we kind of function. I think it has helped me with most of the facets of my life, I really do. It’s just that mentality, that mindset of
“get the job done, get it done right” and just developing that work ethic. I think that’s a pretty unique thing for music educators, is that work ethic. With at least most of them, they know that it takes a lot of time and you do it the right way so it gets done. (Interview 1)

Tom’s personality plays a big role in how he approaches teaching, and although he has been successfully navigating this career for nearly 30 years, he continues to grow and learn. “I still enjoy what I do” (Interview 1).

Successes and Challenges

In Tom’s opinion, flexible licensure has helped his school district better utilize the experience of each music teacher with whom he works. In his current position at the middle school, he feels as though his experience, combined with the variety of classes to which he is assigned, has allowed him to be fairly creative with the music content he teaches.

I have a general music class, which we're trying to get the name called world music because I want to do a lot of different things with them... So far at this point we've been doing hand drums with them. I mean these kids love to hit drums and they’re not music kids, so I think it's pretty cool. I’m trying to get them engaged instead of just, “Here, I’m going to play this CD for you and I would like you to tell me what this makes you think of.” I mean, there'll be some of that - I think that's useful - but I want to make that a very engaging class. (Interview 1)

Because of the flexible nature of what he teaches, Tom can cater to the needs of his students in ways that he was not previously able. For example, he noticed a number of students expressing interest in joining band in middle school after taking his general music rotation or seeing their friends enjoy band, so he created a beginning band for students who did not start in sixth grade. This has given him greater access to an entirely different population of students than he would normally see from year to year, and he enjoys making connections with such a large number of students each year.

Tom is one of two music teachers in the 7th/8th grade middle school within his district. Every class he teaches is comprised of students in both grades. One of the unique successes for
Tom in this context is that older students are able to gain some leadership experience while helping less experienced students and he is able to utilize their strengths in ways that benefit everyone involved. The other music teacher he works with, who primarily teaches choir, is able to assist him with some of the more “administrative” work during the afternoon band classes, such as fixing instruments or getting music and supplies for students.

The choir teacher starts at the high school in the morning, then he comes to [school name] in the afternoon, for, you know, the main choir class, and he helps me with the band like I help him with the choir thing. (Interview 1)

They are also able to split the class sometimes, which has proven to be especially effective coming out of Covid-19 and having larger numbers of students in the band classes.

While Tom feels as though his own background as a band director helps him with planning and being organized in the other classes he teaches, such as choir and general music, he appreciates the assistance of the other music teacher in this unique teaching context.

In Tom’s experience, working in multiple music classroom contexts has often meant teaching subjects that are less enjoyable than others or that take him a bit out of his comfort zone. Over the years, Tom has sometimes been required to teach non-music classes like remedial math.

I have blocked that out of my mind. I’d say that's one of those things where, you know, when they want to do the remediation - it always cracks me up because it's nothing more than class coverage at that point. Sticking a kid in the class with an adult regardless of what that adult’s background is. You know, the kid that struggles in math… you want to give them to an expert to where they know all the tricks. They know all these different things, they can help these kids with the worksheet. And I’m like, uh, I dunno… here, do this worksheet. (Interview 1)

Tom also expressed dissatisfaction with the inconsistency of teaching some music courses, such as music theory, that were often sporadically scheduled one year but not the next. With this type of unstable scheduling, the challenges of working in multiple music classroom contexts are often
exaggerated as planning becomes more difficult. Tom assists with a choir class and has found that classroom management can be tricky since he is less familiar with typical choir procedures and teaching strategies. He also feels that classroom management can be more of an issue with students he doesn’t see from year to year, such as those in the general music rotation.

Tom mentioned that teaching numerous subjects makes his schedule feel busy, and, in the past, scheduling issues have caused a need for itinerant teachers and a general feeling of being “frantic” while everyone was moving around the district. Although he is now teaching in just one building, different job complexities have still come to the surface. Tom identifies as a band director and has primarily held that position throughout his entire career. “My love for all of it was doing the band thing” (Interview 1). In past teaching assignments, Tom was able to see growth in his students from beginning band through high school graduation. However, in his current position, he teaches only middle school and, as mentioned previously, all of his classes contain a mixture of both 7th and 8th grade students. Because of this, he notices that there are “gaps” in terms of certain skills, especially in the band classes, like crossing over the break on the clarinet or knowledge of scales. He feels as though has to meet students in the middle quite often due to the mixed grades and ability levels. The maturity level of students in the mixed grade classes is also a challenge, and Tom sometimes feels like the less mature students lack control and focus. Additionally, Tom has noticed that the time of day he sees students seems to affect their behavior, and although he doesn’t change the content of what he’s teaching sometimes the “intensity” is different between groups. This is especially noticeable in the general music classes, and he has had to adjust his classroom management strategies accordingly.

Circling back to the notion of teaching unfamiliar classes or in uncomfortable contexts, Tom relayed that he has had to do a lot of work on his own to keep up with professional
development and pedagogy for his changing course loads. He frequently watches Ted Talks and reads books about music education. "I enjoy learning more about teaching practices and things like that" (Interview 1). He said that his undergraduate music education felt very surface level in terms of what he’s teaching today and admitted that he’s not sure he would have really known what he needed to know until he was actually “in the trenches” anyway. In that sense, Tom said that classes sometimes feel like trial and error, especially when he’s teaching something that he hasn’t taught in a while, such as general music.

Tom’s main driving force seems to be his continuing passion for and enjoyment of teaching music and the relationships he is able to build with students through this medium. Well into the second stage of his career, Tom has transitioned to a position which allows him more freedom in both his personal and professional life, and he seems quite content with his current teaching assignment. Despite the complexities of teaching in multiple music classroom contexts, Tom is committed to continued growth which has had a positive impact on his career and job satisfaction.

Jeremy

Setting the Stage

Jeremy’s school is a three-hour drive from where I reside, so I traveled to the northwest corner of the state the evening prior to my observation and stayed overnight in the city nearby. The morning of my visit, the sun hadn’t yet come up as I began the 10-minute trek to Jeremy’s building. It was a bit chilly for an August morning, and as I drove out of the city, the landscape immediately changed from neat and tidy neighborhoods to sprawling farmland, which reminded me of my hometown. “Out of our corporation, we’re the closest to [large city with a university], so they’re a little bit [city]-y. But the other two are very farm-y,” Jeremy told me (Interview 1). It
didn’t take long for the school buildings to become visible in the distance, and when I reached my destination, I pulled into a visitor parking space as students scrambled out of busses idling at the front of the school. I made my way to the front office where I was greeted warmly and sent on my own to find Jeremy’s room, which was just a short walk down the adjacent hall and past the gymnasium and art room.

Jeremy’s classroom was neatly organized and separated from the choir room by a shared office space. The room had a flat floor made of white tile and the walls were made of cinder block with some acoustic panels attached here and there. Since the band was involved in a local parade the day after I visited, marching band hat boxes were stacked along the wall at the front and reminders about call time and uniforms were written on the white board just above them. The front of the room also contained Jeremy’s podium, a new Yamaha keyboard and amplifier, a drum set, and various other instruments such as guitar, trombone, flute, and saxophone which Jeremy used to model playing technique while he taught. A laptop projected the day’s objectives onto a small screen above the white board. The décor was typical of most music rooms I have visited, and included bulletin boards with motivational posters, award plaques, and a calendar of events. Cage-style instrument lockers were built along one side of the room and on the other side of the room a large stand held a class set of acoustic guitars with marching percussion instruments and equipment lined up next to it. The back of the room had large windows which allowed quite a bit of natural light to fill the room.

**Professional Life and Work**

Jeremy has been teaching for 18 years in this small, rural school corporation, which is organized into three “schools.” As Jeremy explained, there are two K-12 buildings, and the third “school” is separated between two buildings with elementary students in one and grades six
through 12 in another. The graduating class at Jeremy’s current school averages around 50 to 70 students, with about 230 to 240 students total in the building. Jeremy has taught at the six through 12 building for four years but began his career by splitting the day between his current building and another in the corporation. “For a while there I would have two sixth grade bands, two seventh, two eighth, two high school bands… and then I would combine the two high school bands for contests and parades and stuff like that” (Interview 1). He mentioned several times that the school corporation has been growing, which is part of the reason he has recently moved to teaching in just one building:

Every, like, 10 years they talk about consolidating but our community is really into the whole small school atmosphere because they all came from a small school, so they’d rather pay more and keep it small or something like that. We’re just three tiny schools. (Interview 1)

Each school generally has two music teachers. “The choir teacher usually does all the elementary music and the choir, and then the band teachers usually do all the band and any middle school general music” (Interview 1).

The exceptions are, since the schools have all been growing, a lot of the directors have been helping out in other ways. So, the [other high school in the district] director, she does all the bands but then she does the high school choir, also. The [middle school name] teacher, he does all the bands, but then he also does fifth grade general music. And then at my school, I just do band, but the lady who does choir – she does all the elementary music and then she does seventh and eighth grade and high school choir. (Interview 1)

Despite having an adequate number of highly qualified music educators in the department, Jeremy’s teaching responsibilities have changed quite a bit over the years. He told me this was due to several reasons including school size, program growth, and Covid-19 challenges. While his schedule has remained fairly stable since he’s switched to teaching in one building, he has taught just about every music class offered at some point. His resume includes teaching experience in choir, music history, band, bucket drumming, and class guitar. “At one point…
there was talk of having me do maybe a little bit of elementary” (Interview 1). Because of the different courses Jeremy has taught, he needed to adjust his teaching certification accordingly. “When I went to [university name] my license was secondary instrumental education. I did get it fixed or whatever so I can actually do K through 12 general music and instrumental” (Interview 1). Jeremy also holds a minor in voice.

As we interacted throughout this study, I realized that Jeremy and I have a lot in common not only because of our similar degree tracks, but also because of our career trajectory upon graduation, which led us to teaching in multiple music classroom contexts in small, rural school corporations. Jeremy and I are the same age, and we both somewhat waited until the last minute to audition for music school, during the second semester of our senior year. “I was so indecisive,” Jeremy said (Interview 1). We entered undergraduate programs with degree tracks other than music education - I began as a music composition and music theory major while Jeremy was undecided - and we both added an extra year to our studies because of this. Although we both enjoyed music in high school, neither of us knew if we would enjoy teaching. Jeremy’s background prior to attending college contributed to his decision to ultimately major in music education. “Half my classes each day were music” (Interview 1). He played cello and saxophone and was involved in choral and musical theatre activities in high school. “I knew I wanted to do music, but unless it was teaching music, I didn’t know what else I would do” (Interview 1). We laughed about that together since we’ve now been music teachers for nearly two decades and have advanced degrees in education.

Jeremy currently teaches more band classes than anything else, but also remains active within another area of interest. “I’m the head social studies coach for our academic team. I do that, and I’m also in charge of all the academic teams at our school. I’m the team coordinator”
(Interview 1). Like me, he self-identifies as a “band director” even though he has taught many different music classes (Interview 1). “I like the way it sounds. It’s just the way I’ve always heard it in my head” (Interview 1). His connection with different types of after school activities has provided him with a unique perspective on teaching in a small school corporation.

Because we’re so small, for the programs to exist we have to share so many students. So, my students are in probably about three activities each quarter... And because they’re part of everything, they don’t put as much into each individual thing. (Interview 1)

Although that may sound like a downside to teaching in a small school, he mentioned that it’s also “kinda nice because I get kids in my band that you would probably never see at a big school band – I get kids that are really popular, that are good at all the sports” (Interview 1). Jeremy went on to explain, “They believe they can be in band, too. Nobody’s made it where you have to choose” (Interview 1).

Since many of the programs share a large number of students, Jeremy has been able to build strong relationships with other faculty members in the corporation as they work together to support one another. “My best friend at the school is the basketball coach, and I’m really good friends with the athletic director. I never have to worry about rubbing elbows with athletics. They’re extremely supportive” (Interview 1). When planning for a new school year, all the people who use gyms gather for a meeting to create the master schedule and work around conflicts. He also has a great relationship with the administration at his school, which has allowed him to grow the program to what it is today. “I’m very blessed with a really good principal and my guidance counselor’s husband was a band teacher so she’s very big into band” (Interview 1). Because he works in a small school, Jeremy feels as though he has a lot of flexibility in how things are planned and carried out. “I feel like I have complete control, and I...
feel like I have so much freedom that I can run the program any way I want… It’s only as much pressure as I create for myself” (Interview 1).

Jeremy is very dedicated to his job, and from what I observed he has learned to find the balance between, as he said, “keeping things fun and keeping things serious” (Interview 1). One common thread throughout all the classes he teaches is that he starts and ends each one with an activity, ensuring that students leave his classroom feeling positive about what they accomplished. Jeremy believes that learning music is important in its own right, and he teaches it that way. “I get really turned off when people defend music education by saying how it helps you with math and how it helps you with all these other things” (Interview 1). He was quick to note, however, that he also believes when he teaches music, he is teaching students other important skills. “You teach them how to be disciplined, you teach them how to use higher level thinking” (Interview 1).

I am very big into if you teach kids how to practice, learning how to practice teaches you how to study, and just learning music and having that experience to be able to express yourself is way more important than a lot of people in education are willing to say. (Interview 1)

When discussing what he believed to be the work of teachers, he said, “That’s a hard thing because I don’t really think of it as work - because I feel very invested in it” (Interview 1). He explained, “I definitely feel like there’s a lot of work involved – it takes a lot to get kids from sixth grade to senior year and that can be exhausting, and if you’re not careful it can burn you down” (Interview 1).

I think for me, it’s almost like a workout in that it’s fighting exhaustion. Like, within the day – especially going from high school to sixth grade and having to change kind of your persona a little bit and your expectations a little bit… especially middle school… there’s certain kids that take more effort… to me that’s the work. (Interview 1)
He also explained that the “teaching” part of his job doesn’t make him nervous anymore since he’s been doing it so long, and that he still gets “really excited” about music. “My cup gets filled when we play one of the songs I like really well” (Interview 1). A large portion of Jeremy’s planning centers on music listening and purchasing new pieces for his groups to play. “Most of my unit planning is the concert,” he said, and he plans his year around concerts and other community events (Interview 1).

The support Jeremy receives from the community has contributed to the growth of the music department in recent years. “If you don’t support the community, then they won’t support you” (Interview 1). Although the high school does not have a football team, Jeremy started a marching band program so that students could participate in the numerous parades that occur throughout the area. The marching band’s visibility at these events and the pep band’s performances at athletic games has garnered quite a bit of interest the band, and the students have done well at fundraising. Jeremy also oversees a fairly active Facebook group for the band program where he shares important information and student successes. All of these efforts have positively affected retention and have allowed Jeremy to take all of his groups on trips to perform at Disney World and festivals at amusement parks.

One of the more unique aspects of teaching in a small school district is the opportunity to work with students throughout their entire time in band. Although it’s inevitable that he will lose some students from the program along the way, Jeremy enthusiastically stated, “I feel pretty good about the amount of kids I get in sixth-grade – it’s usually at least half the class, like half the grade” (Interview 1). “I know I teach more kids than anybody else in the school because I get told that a lot. I usually have close to 200 kids coming in and out of my doors each day”
(Interview 1). Over the years, Jeremy has found what works within his school community and has developed a positive classroom culture where students feel excited about coming to class.

In his band classes, Jeremy uses a combination of traditional rehearsal pedagogy and playing educational games, and he gives students meaningful performance opportunities outside of the school day, such as parades and festivals, to keep them engaged. I would describe Jeremy’s approach to teaching as somewhat formal, yet still laid back. He uses a baton when he conducts each band, and he generally stays in the front of the room on the podium while teaching. He does not raise his voice over the students when they become chatty, but instead stands and waits quietly for them to settle down. Although firm in his expectations, Jeremy uses a good amount of humor while teaching which keeps the classroom environment light and fun. For example, when asked to open their books for the day’s lesson, one sixth-grade student loudly proclaimed, “My book disappeared!” Jeremy chuckled and replied, “When you leave today, I will call the police and we will have a search party come look for it” (Observation). While he is very good at error detection and correction, Jeremy also asks students questions to develop higher order thinking skills. During eighth-grade band, Jeremy asked the class, “What key is this piece in?” and received many different answers (Observation). He then asked a student to justify the answer that was given and allowed another student to help formulate the correct explanation. It is clear that students enjoy being in Jeremy’s bands, and they work well together.

Jeremy takes a slightly different approach to teaching classes that aren’t band, although he explained that he feels as though he structures all of his classes similarly. He mentioned feeling more relaxed when teaching guitar and feeling as though he teaches the bucket-drumming class “more like a history class than anything” (Interview 1). Although he doesn’t notice himself being very instrumental- or “band”- minded when planning other classes, Jeremy
admits that he probably does apply much of what he learned as an instrumentalist to the guitar, bucket drumming, and general music classes.

I think the quick answer is yes, but I don’t think the feeling is the same – like I don’t feel like I am when I’m doing it. I probably do like broad stuff and then narrow it down and then broaden. (Interview 1)

This technique is like the macro-micro-macro strategy he learned in undergraduate music education classes.

I asked Jeremy, an instrumental specialist, if he felt like his undergraduate path in instrumental music education helped prepare him for his current or past teaching positions.

I feel like it somewhat did, but I also feel like some of the things I do now, I feel like I get because of the experiences I had before I went to [name of university]. I feel like my playing in high school was a big part of some of my success. When I was little my dad made me take voice lessons and he would have me sing at church once a month. And then, when I was in middle school and in early high school, I was in a bunch of bands, and we’d play and I’d sing in those. I was never in choir, but I was singing. And then at [name of university] I got like two semesters of private vocal lessons and in that we did go over a lot of warm-ups and I did one recital, but if it wasn’t for all that stuff I did before college I don’t know if I would have been as comfortable with it. I still think it would have been ok, but there have been some things I would have had to work a little extra harder at. (Interview 1)

Jeremy stated that while he does have a master’s degree, it’s in general education rather than music, so what he learned through that coursework hasn’t made a major difference in his teaching. To gain new skills, Jeremy has found various forms of professional development that aid in his growth as a music educator. He has attended the Midwest Clinic and his state’s Music Education Association conference several times, and he takes his students to honor bands where he has learned new ideas from watching the guest directors. Additionally, Jeremy has conducted pieces at a band director sight reading session and participated in a golf outing afterward where he was able to talk with other band directors.
One of the weaknesses of the small school is you don’t get to be around other band teachers as much so you don’t get to see other people teach. Those opportunities, they’re not as much as I’d like them to be. (Interview 1)

Despite feeling a bit isolated, Jeremy seems very content in his current position and continues to see success and growth each year.

**Successes and Challenges**

Jeremy’s current teaching assignment in a small, rural school district means that he is the only band director in his building. He teaches sixth through 12th grade in the course of one day, every day, and feels that being able to see students across all grade levels positively contributes to retention in his classes from year to year. Since he is the only person teaching band in his building, he also feels like he has complete control over the curriculum and the freedom to run the band program any way he wants. He doesn’t feel as though there is a lot of external pressure on him in this scenario, and the amount of work stress comes only from what he puts upon himself.

Jeremy has taught in the same school district since beginning his career in music education and has been an itinerant teacher until the most recent five years. Now that he only has one classroom, isn’t traveling, and doesn’t need to navigate different administrative styles, he feels more supported in his efforts.

When I first came to this corporation, they only had like 12 kids in each band. It was super small, and then now that there are like 30 in each grade, they're realizing hey, you know, we have to make changes. I mean that's kind of why four years ago they put me at one school because they realized it was getting too big. (Interview 1)

For Jeremy, this is one of the greatest contributing factors to the successes he has had in recent years. Despite teaching six different courses of varying grade levels throughout the day, Jeremy has been somewhat able to dictate how he’d like his classes to be organized. For example, he has split the high school band into two different class periods to keep the overall number of students
involved higher rather than combining everyone in one class period and competing for enrollment with other courses that run at the same time as band. Additionally, he was able to advocate for splitting up the previously combined 7th and 8th grade band which has allowed him to teach different ability levels more effectively. Finally, Jeremy has been able to simplify his classroom management techniques, such as stepping off the podium or standing and waiting quietly for students to refocus, in ways that can be used throughout all grade levels so students know what to expect from year to year.

Some of the challenges for Jeremy as he navigates working in multiple music classroom contexts are brought to light in conjunction with the school context in which he teaches. Being at a small, rural school has sometimes meant that Jeremy is the only music teacher in his building and has therefore had to teach classes that he was not initially licensed to teach. At one point in his career, this meant updating his licensure accordingly by adding elementary general music certification. Additionally, teaching in a small school often means that Jeremy is sharing students among many different organizations, and he feels that even though band is a co-curricular class, students don’t put as much effort into one individual activity, such as marching band, because they are spread thin.

Another unique aspect of Jeremy’s particular teaching context includes challenges related to scheduling. Currently, the high school band, consisting of students in grades nine through 12, is split between two class periods. This was Jeremy’s choice, as it allowed more students to participate; however, the same comfort level isn’t always present for all students due to smaller class sizes and odd instrumentation. This class organization also creates challenges for Jeremy as he must remember on which instruments to direct his focus since some are only present in one class and not the other. Furthermore, when working on pieces with the high school group that
some students have played before, such as holiday traditions and band favorites, upperclassmen want to push and younger students who haven’t had the experience sometimes struggle to keep up. “They’re always just like let’s just play the whole thing. I'm like no, that doesn't sound good” (Stimulated Recall 2). The challenge for Jeremy in this situation is to keep the rehearsals moving at a pace where all students are growing and learning even though the mixture of different grade levels, experience, and learning levels can work against him.

Jeremy has never been in a situation where he is not teaching multiple grade levels or subjects, yet the challenges of this type of work are still present year to year. He sees more students than any other teacher in his building and teaching often feels like a workout because of this. He mentioned fighting mental exhaustion as he must move from teaching sixth grade through high school each day and feels as though he has to change his persona to meet students’ different age and ability levels. For example, sixth-grade band meets right after lunch, so Jeremy has to “pump them up” and maintain a high level of energy himself in order to fight the lethargy that often happens during that time of day. The seventh-grade band, which Jeremy has only been teaching for two years, is “in the middle” and difficult for him to structure and prep for in terms of pacing. Meanwhile, the eighth-grade band can be a challenge due to differing maturity levels. They are not quite high schoolers, but Jeremy tries to structure the class and push them the same way he does with his high school band. Some classes are more enjoyable for him, like high school and sixth-grade band, so they are easier in his mind, while others take much more effort. Additionally, jumping from grade level to grade level can sometimes be difficult for Jeremy when classes aren’t in order of age or level of difficulty. It takes quite a bit of mental stamina, and since Jeremy is in a situation that doesn’t allow him to see other people teaching in similar contexts, he has to seek out opportunities on his own to connect with and learn from other
professionals in the field who also do this work. Speaking about a music store sponsored event, Jeremy said, “I [conducted] six of the songs for the group sight reading session, and then I did the golf outing afterwards” (Interview 1). "Those opportunities, they're not as much as I'd like them to be… but I do get some” (Interview 1).

Jeremy’s ability to make connections and build relationships in his small, rural community have enhanced his ability to navigate working in multiple music classroom contexts. The support he receives from his administration and other stakeholders is a large part of why Jeremy has remained at his current position despite some of the challenges present in his day-to-day work.

Molly

Setting the Scene

The Cambridge Community School Corporation is in a southern, rural part of the county in which Molly works. It consists of just two buildings that lie side by side, nestled amongst cornfields and the few houses and barns that dot the surrounding landscape. Although they are just a short drive from where I used to teach and where I currently live, I had never visited either building until meeting Molly for my observation. As I drove to Cambridge on the first day of September, I rolled down my windows to soak in the sunny, mid-70-degree weather. Harvest had not yet begun in this area, and as I drove through the fields the rustling of the corn husks reminded me quite a bit of where I grew up. Although my school corporation was just a bit bigger and slightly more rural, the similarities between the Cambridge community and my hometown were quite striking to me on that early morning.

Molly is one of only two music teachers in the school corporation, which consists of about 850 students. She teaches choir at the junior/senior high school in the morning and travels
across the parking lot to teach general music at the elementary school in the afternoon. During the spring semester, Molly also teaches an after-school choir at the elementary school. Her colleague teaches band, primarily at the junior/senior high school, and covers some general music in that building as well. This is Molly’s eighth year as a music educator, and her sixth year at Cambridge. She previously taught choir and general music at a different middle school for two years. Since moving to Cambridge, Molly’s teaching assignment has been the same every year. She has one high school choir, one seventh-grade choir, one eighth-grade choir, and general music classes in grades kindergarten through six on a rotation at the elementary building.

Although Molly earned a dual degree in instrumental/general and choral/general music education and holds dual licensure as well, she has primarily taught choir during her tenure in public schools. I asked her how she refers to herself as a music educator, to which she replied, “Well, I don’t identify as a choral person because I am a band person who is teaching choir” (Interview 1). Molly, a saxophonist, chooses to self-identify as a music teacher rather than categorize herself further:

Normally if somebody asks, I’d say, “Oh, I’m a music teacher.” [They would reply,] “Oh, awesome – what do you teach?” [I would say,] “K-12.” It’s just easier to say it that way. And then I specify that I do elementary music and choir. (Interview 1)

When speaking about her undergraduate education, Molly revealed that all the choral education classes she took helped prepare her the most for her current teaching position. However, only having one elementary general music class made her slightly apprehensive when looking for jobs. “I was scared to take this position because I didn’t feel like I would do well in elementary music. Having one course to cover all of that was not enough” (Interview 1).

And I did not feel prepared for elementary music – when I came here, we didn’t have a curriculum. I had no idea what to teach. I was just kind of randomly coming up with stuff and I didn’t have the textbooks that they had at [name of university], so I was just kind of on my own trying to figure out what worked. (Interview 1)
Molly has spent time educating herself in areas where she feels less prepared as a music educator. Since she knows what she needs to do to be successful teaching choir, most of her time at professional development events is focused on elementary music teaching. When attending the annual state music conference, she prioritizes elementary sessions over choral sessions.

I follow a lot of Facebook groups… to get ideas. When I first started, I bought a couple full lesson sets on Teachers Pay Teachers that I could pull resources from. And from there it’s just kind of been picking and choosing what seems to be successful and if something doesn’t work, I will do it with the rest of the classes in that grade, but I won’t do it again the following year, and I might not elaborate on it. A lot of trial and error. (Interview 1)

Unfortunately, due to the nature and location of her current teaching position, Molly feels quite isolated. “I don’t normally get a chance to see other music teachers who teach the same content” (Interview 1). As someone who taught for 12 years in a very similar situation, I could empathize with Molly. “Like, I can bounce ideas back and forth with the band teacher who at least understands the music side, but we’re not teaching the same content so it’s hard” (Interview 1).

It is clear from observing Molly teach that she cares deeply about her students and strives to make both of her classrooms welcoming spaces for everyone. At the junior/senior high school where she starts her day, Molly teaches in a small room in a newer part of the building. There were many windows without blinds along one side, which allow bright, direct light to stream into the room during every period. The floors were made of large, speckled white tiles, like those found in many standard school classrooms, and the walls were white cinder block. At the front of the room sat an electric piano, and a laptop on a cart pointed toward a projector screen hanging over a whiteboard. Bulletin boards decorated with solfege syllables and the phonetic alphabet flanked the projector screen, and there were several motivational posters scattered around the room. The space was cozy, with string lights along the walls, a colorful lamp in the corner, and a
rug in front where Molly stood to teach. A sign with the words “Happy Things” hung on the front wall and students had written on it with bright markers. A long table with copies of music and worksheets sat opposite of Molly’s small office, which housed a desk, music library, and several books. Molly played pop music over a sound system while the students entered the room, and she greeted them warmly.

**Professional Life and Work**

Molly’s teaching style at the junior/senior high school is very high-energy. Her instruction is clear, she speaks in a loud voice, and she uses a variety of student-centered approaches including questioning, student choice and decision-making skills, and student-led sectional rehearsals. She varies her proximity to students throughout lessons to facilitate individual instruction when needed, and her demeanor remains positive from class to class even though I could see that some groups are clearly more challenging than others. Although she teaches multiple grade levels, her approach to each choir class is very similar. “There are certain things I do with every single grade level, like we do rhythmic and tonal echoing in K through 12, and the seventh, eighth, and high school choirs have the same basic planning idea” (Interview 1). “In all of my classes, especially at the higher levels, we talk about what the plan is for the day and overall plan for the week” (Stimulated Recall 1). Approximately one-third to one-half of the choral class period for each grade level is spent on vocal technique and music literacy activities using a sequence Molly learned during her undergraduate music education courses, and the rest of the class period is devoted to working on repertoire that is mostly taught by rote.

At the elementary level in the afternoon, Molly’s teaching situation is quite different and perhaps less than ideal. While she is fortunate to have her own space, she teaches on a converted stage with a curtain dividing the room from the combined gymnasium/cafeteria. There is
constant, loud noise from students on the other side of the curtain, and there is no air conditioning, so Molly has several fans running during the day which contribute to the overall volume level. Additionally, the room has very high ceilings, cinder block walls, and tiled floors, which do not help absorb any sound. Despite these drawbacks, Molly has made the space very inviting by using colorful décor such as posters with music terms and concepts, bulletin boards containing organizational materials and expectations for each class, world and United States maps, and small record albums scattered around the walls. The back section of the room houses cabinets and baskets full of instruments such as hand drums and other small percussion items like glockenspiels and shakers. In the front of the room is an acoustic piano, a small whiteboard on an easel, and a projector system. There are plastic chairs for students to sit on which seem much too large for the younger students, and Molly has placed colorful dots on the floor to indicate where the chairs should be placed and to help students find their spots for various activities.

In terms of energy and engagement, Molly’s approach to teaching the younger grade levels is similar to how she teaches at the junior/senior high school. However, I noticed that Molly bases the elementary classes around much more structured routines and procedures. She greets each class at the door the same way, and uses the same “Hello” song, attendance sequence, and closing sequence for all classes except for the fifth and sixth grades who can handle a little more autonomy. Although there weren’t too many discipline issues the day I visited, I noticed that Molly used many of the same strategies across the various elementary grade levels during the observation and the video-recorded lesson we watched together.

I would say I follow the same [discipline] plan for all of them. Kindergarten’s a little different – I’m more lenient. Normally with kindergarten I have a jar of balls, so if they’re messing around, I take a ball out and if we get to zero balls then we just stop and sit for a little bit and then we try to go again. But one through six… I mean, basically if
they’re doing something wrong, I call them on it… All of the teachers are really good about listening to feedback on students so that I can choose a consequence in my class, but a lot of them like to follow it up in their own classroom, too. Like in first grade, they have a clip system. If they’re really bad they’ll make them clip down in their home room. Every grade has a different discipline system [outside of my class], but I kind of work with that and then for most of them, they have the clip chart motivator to help them as well. But for every class, if they can’t control themselves with the instruments or if they can’t participate at the beginning of class, they don’t get to do the fun stuff later and they all respond to that pretty well. (Stimulated Recall 2)

With the younger grade levels especially, Molly displayed abundant patience and used plentiful reminders and positive reinforcement. She commonly repeated phrases such as, “Thank you for listening to directions,” “Thank you for being kind,” and “Do the best you can” (Observation).

Molly’s teaching philosophy, or vision for music education, centers around instilling a love of and appreciation for music in her students. “I want to expose them to lots of different types of music, even if they’re ones that aren’t their favorite” (Interview 1). Although she knows that many of her students will not pursue careers in music after graduation, Molly strives to provide them with the tools they will need to be lifelong lovers of the arts.

I want to prepare them to be able to produce music on their own outside of school… not necessarily in a professional setting or even in an ensemble… I feel like my ideals align a lot with the [John] Feierabend method which is to have musical adults who can pass on music and musical-ness to their children and just kind of keep passing that forward. (Interview 1)

In my observations of Molly’s teaching, I noticed that she used a variety of music to engage and challenge her students at each level. Some of the choral repertoire in the upper grades was from the standard canon, but other selections were more contemporary. At the elementary level, students danced and sang to folk tunes and learned about musical form using a song by the pop group Imagine Dragons.

As I watched Molly teach, I was captivated by her seemingly effortless style. She wore a big smile, talked to her students without condescension, and celebrated even the smallest
victories. “Can we give them a stick of applause?” she asked in one class, indicating that students should “clap” with their rhythm sticks for a student who showed improvement by winning a rhythm game in fifth grade (Observation).

I would say the work is to show up every day with a happy, positive attitude to give those kids a safe and happy place to be. And once you have their trust… hopefully able to have their trust… you can work on teaching them the content that you are being told to teach or you want to teach. (Interview 1)

When considering the work of music teachers specifically, Molly indicated that she would break down the concept into two separate things as a choir teacher and as an elementary music teacher:

As a choir teacher - primarily, give students a chance to learn musical concepts through singing choral pieces, or any type of singing, really, and trying to teach them about how music works… trying to work and strengthen their voices so they have an instrument that they can use beyond school with an understanding of music. As an elementary music teacher, I see my primary goal as trying to find positive experiences for the students that train them in the musical concepts they need to know going forward, but try to do it in a happy, engaging way so that they make positive connections with the music. (Interview 1)

“If I were comparing myself to a different classroom-type teacher, I feel like I’m trying extra hard to make my lessons as engaging and entertaining and memorable as I can to try to foster the positive feelings toward music” (Interview 1). It is evident that Molly’s vision for music education and what she believes to be the work of teaching align.

**Successes and Challenges**

Molly teaches a large variety of classes and age levels, and she currently travels between two buildings. Despite seeing 23 different classes each week, Molly has had many successes in her current appointment, which has remained the same since she’s been teaching in the school district. Being able to count on that consistency has helped Molly with long term planning. Additionally, since she sees so many of the same students from year to year, she has been able to make connections and see noticeable growth in many of them. Molly feels that building good
relationships with the students helps them be comfortable engaging in class because they know the expectations. Knowing her students well helps her use her class time effectively and efficiently.

When discussing her work, Molly relayed that she tries to use certain musical strategies with every single grade level, such as rhythmic and tonal echoing, which helps her streamline lesson planning. Similarly, all upper-level choir classes have the same structure, and all elementary classes have shared components such as the same basic classroom procedures and behavior management strategies. Finally, talking through the day’s plan with each class before starting a lesson helps Molly set the intentions for the day, and even though it takes some time it has helped students maintain focus.

Molly feels as though there are more challenges than benefits to teaching so many classes because she can’t give 100 percent of her attention to anything. Even though she had choral courses as part of her undergraduate degree program, she only had one elementary course and was scared to accept her current teaching position because she didn’t feel like she would do well with so many elementary classes each week. There was no elementary music curriculum in place when Molly started teaching in her current context, and therefore she had no idea what to teach, felt like she was all on her own in figuring out what would work, and had to go through a lot of trial and error and adjustment for a few years. Molly sees three sections of kindergarten through fifth grade weekly, but the sixth-grade classes are split into two larger sections with 27 and 29 students each. This creates challenges due to the number of students packed into the less-than-ideal teaching space at the elementary, which is hot, loud, and uncomfortable. The younger students have a lot of energy and can be distracting during lessons, and, like other participants, teaching seventh grade is tough for Molly because of the mix of maturity levels.
Molly physically moves between a junior/senior high school and an elementary building each day, and both buildings have different class time schedules. This creates a lack of dedicated planning time in her day, and she often feels very isolated. “There's a lot of time that goes into planning, and I don't ever feel like I'm properly planned for anything” (Interview 1). Even though she feels she can bounce ideas around with the band teacher, they don’t share content so it’s difficult to apply some of what they discuss. In Molly’s view, elementary and junior/senior high school feel like two completely different realms because they just don’t connect. “Going from high school to kindergarten in the same day is a big stretch” (Interview 1). Compared to a regular classroom teacher, Molly feels like she tries “extra hard” to make lessons as engaging as possible so that students will want to stay in music classes throughout their entire schooling. However, she has found that having the same students year after year can be challenging if they don’t connect with her very well. Furthermore, Molly identifies more as a “band person” than a “choral person,” but she’s not currently teaching band which is something she really enjoys.

Since Molly has been in her current position the longest of her two teaching assignments, she has learned how overcome many of the challenges of moving between buildings and from grade level to grade level. However, she still feels as though there is a lack of consistency in her days and has expressed the desire to be in a position that allows her to utilize her strengths in ways that benefit her personal life and goals a bit more. Despite this, Molly’s continued pursuit of excellence in teaching and her commitment to building relationships with her students and the community in which she teaches helps her remain focused and motivated while teaching in multiple music classroom contexts.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to represent the professional lives and work of four experienced music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts. The central research question developed for this study was: How do participants describe the key elements in their professional lives and work in multiple music classroom contexts? Participant stories were told in portraiture form in Chapter IV, and provided rich details about each participant’s educational background, the context in which they teach, their thoughts about their work, and perceived successes and challenges of teaching in their specific multiple music classroom contexts. While portraiture as an approach to research often includes the inclusion of a “group portrait,” I have chosen to present commonalities and outliers that emerged through peer review while looking across the four individual participant profiles and, where appropriate, draw in findings from past literature. I also include my own voice while still honoring the unique experiences and contexts in which each participant lives and works. Chapter V presents the themes of music teaching and learning, school, relationships, and navigating personal and professional life intersections (see Figure 8) and includes a discussion of relevant literature.
Teaching and Learning in Multiple Music Classroom Contexts

Teaching certain ages seemed to be more demanding than others for some participants, and teaching so many different grade levels throughout the day can present some major challenges. The three participants who teach in middle school settings all mentioned that seventh grade was quite difficult to structure. Jeremy and Molly’s thoughts about this age were similar: “So they're kind of like… you're still in that middle of sixth grade and not quite to eighth grade. I find it the hardest class to pace” (Jeremy, Interview 1). “Seventh grade is my middle… they are weird. Little kids… but they seem so tough… I don’t even know what they are” (Molly, Interview 1). Reflecting upon my own experiences teaching in multiple music classroom contexts, I remember feeling the same way about seventh grade. I taught in a building with sixth through eighth grade students, and the cognitive and physical differences between, and
sometimes even within, the grade levels were often staggering. Tom, who teaches classes with both seventh and eighth grade students mixed together, said, “You have some kids that could probably handle being in high school at that age and then you’ve got some seventh-grade kids who probably have a fifth-grade maturity level at times” (Tom, Stimulated Recall 2). The challenges of working in this setting may be amplified for Tom, as he must navigate understanding and adjusting to two very different age levels in each class he teaches. Jeremy feels like he must change his persona to meet students’ different age and ability levels, which can lead to exhaustion as he feels it takes quite a bit of mental stamina to jump from grade level to grade level, especially when classes in his schedule aren’t in order of age level or difficulty.

Connecting to Tom’s experience with teaching mixed seventh and eighth grade classes, other participants noted that their classrooms are often unique contexts because grade levels can be combined within the same class period, unlike in other core classes where only one grade level at a time is typically learning together. Additionally, students in large ensembles like band or choir are often enrolled in the same course for multiple years, especially at the secondary level. While these scenarios can create challenges for educators in planning and structuring classes so that all students continue to learn at developmentally appropriate levels, they can also provide positive experience for students. In Tom and Britney’s classes, older students often take on leadership roles which can positively impact the classroom culture.

One thing that’s been kind of cool is a lot of seniors are really wanting to take multiple jazz bands just because they have room in their schedules. So, it almost becomes like a side-by-side program in Jazz Four and Five, with kids that are going to All-State and then kids that can barely play their horn. It’s a really interesting kind of mix of levels in those bottom two bands. (Britney, Interview 1)

However, when music educators see the same students in the same class year after year (e.g., high school band), they essentially must “reinvent” their curricula each year through
choosing new repertoire and materials. Although some of the same overarching concepts, such as rhythms or musical expression, may be addressed each year, it would not be logical for a music educator to approach teaching those concepts in the exact same ways as it would not benefit students or challenge them in their musical development. This was a constant source of worry for me as I only had one high school concert band in my teaching assignment, and I often struggled to make sure I was meeting the needs of beginners and more advanced students with both repertoire choice and the teaching and assessing of concepts. Choosing new literature each year, although often a source of joy, as in Jeremy’s case, can contribute to a heightened workload over the summer:

As far as planning, over the summers I like to just do tons of music listening. Generally, the first couple weeks when school's out I just take a break and don't do anything and then probably after a couple weeks I start getting the itch about okay, what are we going to play next year and I’ll just listen to songs, and songs, and songs. (Jeremy, Interview 1)

This scenario of having mixed grade levels, and the same students in the same class for multiple years, is quite unlike many other subjects where students are enrolled for one semester or one year. In these situations, such as Algebra or 9th grade English, the curriculum generally stays consistent as students are not taking the courses multiple times and are enrolled in them during specific grade levels.

Adding to the complexity of teaching in multiple music classroom contexts, participants in this study began their careers teaching music subjects in which they felt a least somewhat underqualified or ill-prepared, and their feelings about undergraduate preparation are consistent with literature about sources of stress for public school music teachers and teaching outside of specialty areas (Gordon, 2000; Scheib, 2003). Past literature has revealed that undergraduate music education students are unsure about their likelihood to teach outside their specialization

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and their perceived ability to do so (Hamann & Ebie, 2009; Mishra, 2008). In a NAfME website publication about challenges facing beginning music educators, Brand (2012) stated:

Much to their surprise, first-year teachers often find themselves in a content area of music education in which they have had limited experience during student teaching. Consequently some who teach music courses lack the requisite training, interest, and skills. For example, a graduating music education major may count on finding a senior high school band position. After all, his student teaching was at this level in which he feels most comfortable, but he may find himself in a junior high school teaching both general and instrumental music. (para. 7)

Additionally, teachers typically do not purposefully seek jobs outside of their specialty but will accept a position where it is required as a part of their teaching responsibilities (Arnold, 2018), as was the case for all participants in this study.

The participants in this study expressed difficulties with teaching content they considered to be outside of their specialty area or that was different from what they imagined they would be teaching once they finished their undergraduate degree programs. Each participant expressed feeling only somewhat prepared to teach in their current contexts based upon the music education courses they took and discussed ways in which they had to seek out information to continue to grow and learn on their own as they moved through teaching in different music classroom contexts:

I don't know that anyone prepares them for what they're doing 10 years later, because you've built 10 years of experiences… the guy I student taught with, he was like a militant guy… He's like listen, you're not going to get everything from college. You've got to figure it out on your own, so that's why you're here. He was like, college doesn't make you who you are, you decide what to get out of that experience and then where to go find your other experiences. So, that to me just was the epitome of college. Maybe because it was kind of lacking in some areas it made me figure out how to go and figure out what I wanted to do and the knowledge I needed to do it and go seek out other places, so maybe that actually was a huge catalyst for what I’m doing now, as far as my brain and trying to seek out information because I don't see it right in front of me, so I’ve got to figure out where it is. (Britney, Interview 1)

Tom said:
They teach you what you need to do, what you need to know, but it absolutely is secondary... it's like what you learn when you're on the job. And you know the experience and the confidence that you gain from me from doing the job versus, you know, well, I read this book... I will say it prepares you from the standpoint of, okay, administratively, this is what you're going to be dealing with... and trying to help you to, I guess, understand what you're going into, but you don't really truly understand it until you're in there. In the trenches. (Tom, Interview 1)

Jeremy had many musical experiences prior to attending college, and he feels like those contributed quite a bit to his current understanding of teaching. “I also feel like some of the things I do now, I feel like I got because of the experiences I had before” (Jeremy, Interview 1). Jeremy was involved in choirs, musical theatre, and took guitar lessons before beginning his music education degree. “I think those things I did before [name of institution] plus [name of institution] together probably made me really comfortable... but there have been some things where I have had to work a little extra harder” (Jeremy, Interview 1). In Molly’s case, although she identifies more as an instrumentalist, she stated, I feel like I was the most prepared for teaching choir... I also taught choir at my last position, and that was probably helpful... but since there were so many choral teaching classes that were offered, I felt like that was really helpful. I was really scared to take this position because I didn't feel like I would do well in elementary music, because I felt like having one course to cover all of that was not enough. (Molly, Interview 1)

In some instances, participants in this study were asked to teach courses they were less familiar with well into their teaching careers. Often there are challenges in securing a teaching position, such as geographical limitations and lack of jobs available within specialty areas (Corfield-Adams, 2012; Kuebel, 2017), and experienced teachers who have settled into their communities, schools, and are established in their careers may choose to accept teaching courses outside of their specialty rather than trying to find a new position that may better suit their desires and abilities. This was the certainly the case during my career, as I clearly remember being told that I could either teach choir at the high school level or look for another job. I had
already established myself in the community and, at the time, did not see any job postings that were aligned with my experience and career goals. I was of the mindset that I could learn how to teach choir as an instrumental specialist, and decided to stay in the position while committing to seeking out help as needed. Past literature indicates that music teachers believe having solid teaching skills, strong self-efficacy, and a desire to teach and learn can help overcome challenges of teaching content in which they may not have specialized (Kuebel, 2017; Sckipp, 2010).

Although these are not necessarily music-specific skills, participants in this study discussed the need to be lifelong learners and have an orientation toward growth mindset to successfully teach within multiple music classroom contexts. “At the same core it’s still teaching music, and I’m going to do well with that” (Kuebel, 2017, p. 10) – a sentiment which echoes the mindset of myself and the participants in this study.

To work around some of the areas where they feel they may lack necessary pedagogical skills, participants have taken the initiative to find opportunities that allow them to continue to learn while on the job. Much of the professional development opportunities their school districts provide do not directly relate to music teaching and learning. Veteran music teachers often need different professional development opportunities than early-career educators (Eros, 2012). The participants in this study expressed various methods of meeting their own learning needs as they progressed through their careers, especially when they were required to take on additional music courses with which they had less familiarity. All participants seemed to find ways of combating the challenges of working in multiple music classroom contexts by looking for learning opportunities on their own. Britney seeks out other professionals in the field, Tom reads books and listens to Ted Talks, and Jeremy and Molly have discussions with colleagues and attend music-specific professional development conferences or workshops. Taking continuing
education courses, serving as mentors, and seeking opportunities on their own to satisfy their specific needs (Conway, 2008) were all viable options for the teachers in this study. Additionally, hands-on activities and collaboration, such as Britney’s proclivity toward music-making and working with other professionals in the field, may be important aspects of professional development for educators at this stage (Conway et al., 2018; Pellegrino, 2015; Stanley et al., 2014; West, 2011).

One aspect of music teachers’ work that is often unique when contrasted with other content areas is the abundance of co-curricular activities, or those which occur in addition to the normal in-school course of study. For performance-based courses such as band, choir, or orchestra, co-curricular activities might include concerts, sporting events, and school or community sponsored performance opportunities like parades or festivals. Many of the participants in this study teach ensembles that include frequent, time consuming rehearsals after school, such as hand chimes, choir, and marching band. In addition to overseeing co-curricular rehearsals and activities, music teachers frequently spend several hours outside of the school day preparing students for all-state or college auditions, providing extra music lessons, or supervising practice sessions for students. Participants’ comments about their after-school commitments suggested they had mixed feelings about this aspect of their work. Britney consistently looks for performance opportunities for her jazz bands outside of school, and many students have formed their own bands and found gigs based on the experiences they had with co-curricular and other after school performances. Tom decided to change paths during the second stage of his career from teaching high school, which had numerous after school commitments, to teaching middle school, with far less co-curricular activities, as he wanted to make room for more family and personal time. In Jeremy’s case, starting a marching band led to greater visibility within the
community and had a positive impact on the level of support for the music program overall, but for Molly, co-curricular events created feelings of being stretched a bit thin at times. Working in multiple music classroom contexts again adds to the complexity of scheduling and attending these co-curricular activities, especially when one teacher is working with several different ensembles that may have overlapping festivals or performance opportunities.

**School Work**

This section reports on two non-music specific themes related to teachers’ work, administrative duties and the notion of routine, that may be found across many different school subjects. Administrative tasks are a part of most teachers’ workload regardless of content area, and for those who have multiple preps throughout the school day, these duties can sometimes seem daunting, less enjoyable, or time consuming. When I was teaching in multiple music classroom contexts, finding a good organizational system was important because of the numerous pieces of sheet music, worksheets, instruments, and other materials I had to keep track of daily. Additionally, especially early in my career, I found myself spending time at school on the weekend or late into the evening on weekdays due to co-curricular activities I as responsible for that met directly after school hours.

When discussing what participants believed to be the work of teaching, I found that most did not limit their answer to the *act* of teaching or providing instruction, and also included other duties that they were required to do as part of their job. Tom was quick to separate the term “work” from the term “teaching,” which somewhat surprised me, as prior to our discussion I had thought of the two terms interchangeably and looked at both with a mostly positive orientation. For Tom, *teaching* is still gratifying, but the administrative *work* he must do on a daily basis is
less enjoyable. The “work” aspect of his job feels like jumping through hoops to get to the
enjoyable parts of teaching.

The work side to it for me is all of the administrative crap that we are constantly… like
right now, before the end of September, I think I’ve got six videos to watch… it's like the
red tape that we have to do… that is work. And to me, if I can brutally describe it to
someone, I would say the worst part of it is all of that. It's everything that we have to do
just to keep… certification and keep our credentials up… (Tom, Interview 1)

Britney also mentioned administrative tasks such as copying papers, taking attendance, and
participating in mandatory job training as part of the work of teaching:

I think it's the preparation of literally being at the copy machine and getting everything in place
so that kids can walk in and you can just rehearse. And then they can find everything that they
need on their online classroom so they're not constantly - it's anticipating what their needs will be
and trying to prepare for those.” (Britney, Interview 1)

Educational policy initiatives also contributed to increased administrative duties for
participants in this study. Each teacher has either a homeroom (Tom), study hall (Britney), or
student resource period (Jeremy and Molly) in which they are often required to provide academic
support or administer certain school-wide tasks to the students in their classrooms. Interestingly,
the students in these classes are often not enrolled in music courses with the participants. Tom
described the activities that typically take place in his first period homeroom:

We have what's called advisory period, which is kind of homeroom, [we] kind of cover a
lot of details with the kids. They’re not band kids – there’s a couple of band kids in there
just ironically… that period is only about 20 minutes long… there's like a math/language
arts program we’ve done… so we’ll eventually start to filter that in, but there's a lot of
SEL [social emotional learning] type activities and things like that going on. (Tom,
Interview 1)

Conversely, Jeremy’s student resource period (SRT) takes place at the end of the day. “The last
half hour or so is what they call SRT which is a resource time that everybody has. The whole
school has it – they use it for remediation” (Jeremy, Interview 1). He mentioned that over the
years he has been able to start requesting band students be placed in his SRT class since so many were coming to his room for extra instruction or practice time anyway. The student resource time at Molly’s school occurs for 28 minutes on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday mornings, and, unlike the other participants, she is able to use that time as a prep rather than to supervise students which allows her to offset the days where she typically has no time for administrative tasks or planning. Other teachers in her school, however, must use that time for remediation, as in Jeremy’s situation.

Music teachers, like those in this study, do sometimes communicate negative feelings toward the administrative work required of them as part of their teaching responsibilities. In some cases, if they “could just teach” (Shaw, 2016, p. 112) they would feel better about their work. While past literature has revealed that administrative duties can be a source of stress (Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Scheib, 2003; Shaw, 2016), the educators in this study seemed to accept those responsibilities as simply part of the job that must be completed. None of the participants openly mentioned the notion of burnout, but, having felt similar stressors as an experienced educator myself, I perceived some frustration in tone of voice and facial expressions throughout our discussions of “work.”

One of the largest overarching themes to emerge from this study was the notion of routine, which is not new in the field of education. Seminal studies about teacher thought and planning have suggested that routines help teachers stay organized, simplify instruction, and establish classroom procedures (Yinger, 1979, 1980). This element of teachers’ work was apparent from the first conversation I had with each educator, even though it often looked quite different from teacher to teacher. Observations and stimulated recall episodes revealed that all four participants had specific ways in which they structured their classes overall, and this macro
structure was carried out in each class regardless of subject or age level being taught. With some teachers, however, routine was more nuanced in various aspects of their teaching.

Participants in this study found routines to be an important component of teaching in multiple music classroom contexts, and use routines to implement activities (Jeremy), execute instruction (all), streamline management (Molly), and carry out large-scale planning (all) (Yinger, 1979, 1980). When I observed Britney’s classes I immediately noticed the consistent structure across each jazz band and how effortlessly students seemed to navigate the first 10 or 15 minutes of each class period, almost on their own. Since Britney mainly teaches jazz band, she uses the same warm-up routine for each class but tailors the difficulty of the concepts according to her students’ ability levels. Although she has established the same procedures in each class, Britney mentioned, “Having that routine in all five bands… it’s up to me to keep it fresh for them, so that’s where my challenge is” (Britney, Stimulated Recall 1). While classroom routines have the potential to become monotonous or even meaningless, Britney has been able to vary the structure of her routine just enough to where students still feel challenged.

Tom’s routine comes in the form of a daily assignment which he uses as both a “bell ringer” to start the class and focus the students as well as a means for him to have time to take attendance or perform other administrative tasks before digging into the content of the lesson. Jeremy’s routine includes daily announcements and the agenda projected on a screen in the front of his classroom and including a fun activity or game in each lesson. Like Tom, Molly has a fairly standard opening and closing routine for each of her elementary classes, a routine classroom management system, and a similar overall class structure for her junior/senior high school classes.
While the routines in Tom, Jeremy, and Molly’s classrooms tended to be a bit more managerial than Britney’s since they have a greater variety of content to teach, I noticed that having procedures and practices in place seemed to lessen the chaos that can often occur at the start and end of a class period. Music classes typically have large numbers of students, and many times there are questions, problems, broken instruments, missing music, and a myriad of other issues that demand a teacher’s attention and in-the-moment decision making skills. As seen here, establishing an opening and closing sequence can provide structure for students and teachers alike.

**Relationships**

Although perhaps not singular to working in multiple music classroom contexts, the desire to build positive relationships with students, the community, administrators and faculty members, and musical “others” was apparent in the interactions I had with participants. Based on my observations of the experienced music educators in this study and reflection upon my own work in multiple music classroom contexts, it seems that teaching in these situations may necessitate some strategic relationship building with various stakeholders, as well as with students, to strengthen and further the aims of the music education programs that include teachers who are “doing it all.”

Through my observations, I saw many instances of student-teacher interactions that were positive and some that were perhaps more disciplinary or managerial in nature, as is to be expected in a classroom setting. In most cases, participants spoke more about their students than they did themselves when thinking about different aspects of their work, and often in different ways. Britney discussed her desire to help students feel like they fit in somewhere at the high school, and how teamwork is important to her: “I want to be open to learning from the students
and to make it a more collaborative classroom” (Britney, Interview 1). This is a concept that carries through each of Britney’s classes regardless of age level, and students respond positively to the culture she has built within her program. Similarly, Tom mentioned trying to create a welcoming environment in the general music class “even though those kids and the subject can kind of drive me a little bit crazy” (Tom, Interview 1). Sometimes it can be difficult to foster positive or lasting relationships with students when a teacher only sees them for a small amount of time during one school year and in a class that they are required to participate in as part of a course rotation. Tom stated, “I focus on trying to really build good relationships with the kids. I enjoy when they come in. I try to greet every single one of them… and I try to do it by name” (Tom, Interview 1). For Jeremy, knowing his students also relates to knowing the expectations and demands of his teaching context, as he must share a large number of students among many different school activities: “You have to know what the school is about… these kids are here because they want to be a part of everything” (Jeremy, Interview 1). Molly mentioned feeling the need to gain students’ trust and giving her students a “safe and happy place to be” (Molly, Interview 1) before she could really dig into the content.

Although participants expressed the desire to know their students well, this part of their work has often been challenging throughout their careers. Being an itinerant teacher and working in multiple music classroom contexts did not allow many of the music teachers to feel as though they had the time to make connections with students (Britney, Tom, and Molly), and sometimes working with the same students year after year made it difficult to bond when students didn’t necessarily click with their teacher (Molly). Moving to and from different classrooms or buildings gave teachers little time to answer student questions before or after class and made
Teachers feel “frantic” (Britney, Interview 1), like they “couldn't focus on much of anything” (Tom, Interview 1), and “unplanned” (Molly, Interview 1).

The nature of music classrooms, especially at the secondary level, allows teachers to see students for more than just one semester or year which can have an impact on relationship-building. “When you do have a student longer than a year you are really invested in them because they are your program and if you don’t know them, or understand them, or respect them, and if you don’t know them past their name…” (Conway et al., 2018, p. 311) this could cause a negative interaction. In her situation, Molly feels as though forming positive bonds with her students is extremely important because she may have them in class from the time they start Kindergarten to the time they graduate. She stated:

...I get to see so many kids, which is nice… I get to see the same kids move and grow from elementary up through the high school levels. So that's nice to have familiarity with the students and it can be a help and a hindrance for recruiting into my high school choir depending on what group there with…it's also challenging to have the same kids every year, at the same time, because you get those that don't want to be there and they connect with other teachers and they don't connect with you as well. (Molly, Interview 1)

Similarly, Britney stated:

…but I try to have my kind of list of all five jazz bands with their names so as I’m listening to a chart I’m also looking at the kids and picturing them playing this so that I’m like, oh yeah, this kid would be a great stand out or this would be a really good challenge for this particular student, or you know what this chart might just be so difficult that it might be discouraging for them, so let's maybe save that for the end of the year when they've gotten a little bit more experience. (Britney, Interview 1)

Tom mentioned his desire to know the students on a more personal level, including learning about their interests:

I think trying to break through to that side of it, where you find out who are the football players in here. They had their first game at the middle school level last week, and so I said okay, who do you play? All right, [name of school]? Let's see. I’m guessing you're going to win. Here's what I’m gonna say is the score. So, I put the score up on the board that's what I think the score is going to be, you know, and then I left it up there and they had their game. And all the kids were like, you're right we won, but your score was way
off, Mr. [last name]. And I was like, yeah, no shit man *(laughs)*. But, I want to know the kids. *(Tom, Interview 1)*

It is logical that students would benefit from and be more engaged in a classroom where positive student-teacher interactions are occurring, and where teachers approach planning with students’ needs in mind. Adaptive expertise literature in both music education *(Johnson & Matthews, 2017)* and general education fields *(Hayden et al., 2013; Parsons, 2012; Parsons & Vaughn, 2013; Vaughn, 2015; Westerman, 1991)* maintains that teachers who seek to know and understand their students well are better able to meet their students’ needs. Remaining objective *(Hayden et al., 2013)*, adjusting teaching strategies to provide more individualized instruction *(Parson & Vaughn, 2013)*, making connections with students *(Vaughn, 2015)*, and thinking from the students’ perspectives while planning *(Westerman, 1991)* may contribute to greater awareness in the classroom and the ability to streamline work. When music teachers plan, items related to student learning objectives often include both musical and non-musical goals such as fostering a long-term appreciation for music and helping students with life skills like working together and respecting each other *(Johnson and Matthews, 2017)*. All participants in this study expressed the desire to help their students foster lasting appreciation for music, and both Britney and Tom mentioned they felt their classes taught students about teamwork, leadership skills, and building community in addition to music.

The notion of community was seen from different perspectives in the work of Britney and Jeremy. For Britney, the term “community” included a bit larger landscape than her surrounding physical area. She started joining local and state music education boards and encouraging other teachers to do the same, knowing that building these types of relationships would positively impact her teaching: “I just thought, man, if I’m connected to those people, maybe I will be able to glean some things from them” *(Britney, Interview 1)*. For Jeremy, making connections within
the community where he teaches was a vehicle for positive change within his music program: “If you don't support the community, then they won't support you” (Jeremy, Interview 1). When planning, Jeremy said he tries to keep in mind the different parades and events in his small town and the neighboring larger city because the more the students are involved the better they do in fundraising, which contributes to the overall wellbeing of the music department.

A unique part of Britney’s vision for music education includes exposing her students to a diverse group of educators and musicians from whom they can learn.

I just feel like it makes my teaching a little bit more - I don't know - alive or dynamic… We can talk about the times that we've played on a gig together… and it also brings a lot of, I guess, legitimacy or kind of connects all the dots for my students. (Britney, Interview 1)

As a performing musician and teacher, Britney seeks out musicians who she feels will be able to teach not only her students, but herself as well.

I’m just trying to surround myself with these great people all the time and then not being annoying but just asking questions about hey, why do you do that. And then I can take that back to my drummers or my saxophone players. (Britney, Interview 1)

She has also started to bring in experienced musicians to work with her students and has found that to enhance her daily work in the classroom, and her administration support her in this decision.

Building strong relationships with administration and faculty can be challenging within the traditional, hierarchical structure of schools, and particularly for educators who are itinerant and teaching non-core classes. The experienced music educators in this study, especially when they were itinerant teachers, mentioned feelings of isolation and lack of support. However, it seems that as they progressed through their careers, many learned how to ask for what they needed and to seek support in ways that were beneficial in their unique contexts. When these relationships are formed in positive ways, like in Britney and Jeremy's situations, the effort can
be beneficial. “I think one of the reasons why it [the jazz program] has been successful is that I’ve known when to ask for things at the right time” (Britney, Interview 1).

… before I asked the counselors or the principal, working it out amongst my colleagues to make sure that all the classes would be covered so I’m not leaving anyone in a lurch and then going in to say hey we can't have this gap in the curriculum so we're going to need this like second or third jazz band, but at this one level. If I can get enough kids to sign up for concert band… basically making sure everyone's going to be happy… so always being that team player, I think, is huge… (Britney, Interview 1)

When he moved from teaching at two schools to only working at his current school, Jeremy mentioned needing to explain to his administration how band students progress from year to year and the importance of having classes split by grade and ability level, “so they got it” (Jeremy, Interview 1). Having those open conversations allowed Jeremy room to grow the band program. Jeremy also feels comfortable working with the guidance counselor and other faculty members because he knows that he needs to be able to schedule events and plan classes based upon sharing students: “The last week of school, or like the first week we're not at school, we have a meeting… and it lasts three hours and we go through and create our schedules” (Jeremy, Interview 1).

Micropolitics also come into play when teachers strive to build relationships within their school buildings and districts. Relational needs and social networks change with the amount experience teachers have, and while early career teachers are more hesitant to build relationships with administration or other faculty and staff for fear of seeming too needy, veteran teachers appear to have more focused relationships that pertain to specific questions or needs rather than day-to-day interactions that are necessary for survival in the early years of teaching (Shaw, 2020). This is especially evident in Britney’s context, where she has learned how to ask administration for what she needs when she needs it, and in Jeremy’s context as he expressed
feeling comfortable discussing needs with administration and other faculty in his current position even though he did not always feel supported in the earlier stages of his career.

Navigating Personal and Professional Life Intersections

Many times, music teachers’ hobbies align with their work, creating unique opportunities for connection and application to the classroom. Many teachers in other content areas may not have this possibility. Music teachers sometimes self-identify as musicians and then teachers, or vice versa, or even both simultaneously, as they frequently work as performing musicians outside of their daily school duties. For Britney, “I think all of that just makes a very integrated life for me” (Britney, Interview 1) – one in which she tries to see each of her personal performance experiences as an opportunity to learn, grow, and share with her students. “When I’m on the bandstand doing a gig, I’m paying attention to things and as I learn things, or I have these funny anecdotes, I take those back into the classroom.” (Britney, Interview 1).

I think it impacts my teaching because students see that I’m practicing what I’m preaching by being not only a teacher but also playing the music, you know, that I’m teaching, which is a whole lot of fun. So, I think that's kind of, I don’t know, probably the biggest parts of just integrating my hobbies and what I consider to be my career and they all converge into one thing. (Britney, Interview 1)

Sometimes when teachers work in multiple music classroom contexts, it is difficult not only to plan and organize what occurs daily at school and during co-curricular activities, but also to maintain time for life events and commitments that do not have to do with their work. Work-life balance is important to Jeremy and Tom. Jeremy briefly mentioned that he has been married for 14 years and has one child. He stated that his family is also very invested in the band and his wife teaches the color guard and helps plan his yearly fundraisers. Jeremy does not perform in any outside ensembles and tries to keep all of his vacation time devoted to family. Tom discussed the importance of taking a step back from secondary classroom responsibilities
during the second stage of his career to make more space for his family and personal life. When he taught mostly at the high school level, his after-school hours were spent working with the indoor percussion ensemble and his summers were filled with marching band rehearsals. Now that Tom is exclusive teaching in a middle school setting, he has far less outside of school commitments as most of his work takes place in the classroom. He mentioned how this has affected his planning, but not necessarily in a negative way.

What I have tried to do the last couple of summers since I haven't been doing the summer band thing - because previously that was pretty much all I did, and it was frantic getting back in school… it's nice to have this planning time. I did spend a considerable amount of time away because I just needed to get away. I didn't want anything to do with school or anything like that so as it hit into about into July, I started to get kind of that feeling of alright gotta go… (Tom, Interview 1)

Tom also uses his after-school time to teach lessons, which keeps him grounded in his musician identity, although he rarely performs professionally anymore. “The whole musician thing, I mean, I teach lessons, but I don't feel like I get to play much at all, which is fine, you know” (Tom, Interview 1). He also plays along with his students in class:

It’s kind of fun. I will, with the percussion class, I keep a practice pad, of course. I mean, I play all the rudiments and stuff with them, you know, we try to get the doctor beat cranking away in there and just play stuff together, and so… I’m still hacking through. Those cadences, they never leave your hands. It’s like: [name of university Tom attended]! They’re cheesy as anything now, of course. You know that muscle memory. Never goes away. Fun licks to play and everything. (Tom, Interview 1)

Molly was pregnant with her first child and preparing for maternity leave at the time of data collection. I perceived the challenges of her intersecting personal and professional lives to be more overt and somewhat overwhelming at times. Prior to watching the video of her teaching a first grade lesson during a stimulated recall episode, Molly mentioned feeling slightly unsure about how prepared her students would be when it was time to take her leave of absence and be replaced by a substitute teacher. “The main goal of the day was to start something for a virtual
Christmas program that we're trying to do before I have to go on leave, so we'll see if it happens or not” (Molly, Stimulated Recall 2). Upon reviewing the video, Molly then stated:

In general, all of my kids have been super squirrely the last two weeks. Pre-Halloween and post Halloween has been rough. I felt really harsh listening to myself, like calling them on their behaviors, but I’m trying to get them as good as I can before I leave and have my maternity sub so I’m trying to be extra picky right now. (Molly, Stimulated Recall 2)

The stresses of leaving your classes in the hands of another teacher can weigh heavily on a teacher, as there is much to prepare. Molly frequently spoke of the challenges of planning for classes in her specific teaching context apart from the added obstacle of preparing for maternity leave, the number of classes she teaches, and her desire for personal time: “There's a lot of time that goes into planning. I don't ever feel like I'm properly planned for anything” (Molly, Interview 1). “I can't say that I'm good at planning too early, because I just I need the time for myself” (Molly, Interview 1). In addition, Molly disclosed that although she is not necessarily unhappy in her current workplace, she might be looking for a different teaching position where she won’t feel stretched so thin and where she can use her skills in more productive and effective ways.

Britney, Tom, and Molly discussed aspects of their professional lives that intersect with their personal lives. What seemed to emerge as a result of our conversations were two contrasting themes: (a) the ability to bring growth and insight to the classroom (Britney), and (b) tension (Tom and Molly). Britney found joy in embracing the notion of being a musician and a teacher and allowed the intersection of those two identities to positively impact her teaching situation, while Tom and Molly discussed tensions related to planning and lack of time for family.
Music educators may face ambiguity in their lives based upon six role stressors: (a) role conflict; (b) role ambiguity; (c) role overload; (d) underutilization of skills; (e) resource inadequacy; and (f) nonparticipation (Scheib, 2003, p. 125). There are often unique demands placed upon music educators, such as increased performance expectations from administration, sharing teaching spaces with other people, large numbers of students in classes, planning, after-school commitments, and visibility of the music program, which can cause difficulties in balancing professional responsibilities with personal lives and desires (Gordon, 2000; Hamann & Gordon, 2000; Scheib, 2003, 2006; Shaw, 2020). These findings align with Molly’s planning frustrations and her desire for personal time, which may become more exaggerated once her child is born as there could be additional role stressors added to her life. However, Molly also demonstrates positive qualities of time management, multitasking, organization, priorities which echo findings in Fitzpatrick’s (2013) case study of a female band director navigating the intersections of motherhood and her career.

Music educators may also experience role stress due to lack of professional development for those who identify as both performers and teachers (Scheib, 2006), but active music making can bring some satisfaction to teachers who choose to continue performing (Bernard, 2004a; Pellegrino, 2015). In some ways, as seen in Britney’s story, teachers’ music making can strengthen classroom instruction (Bernard, 2004b). Teachers who are also performers can use their experiences to bridge the gap between classroom content and real-world application of skills. Additionally, as Britney mentioned, students are able to see their teachers “practice what they preach” as they continue to be lifelong musicians.
Chapter V Summary

Chapter V presented a discussion of larger themes found throughout the portraits in Chapter IV and participant data sets. Macro findings in this chapter included music teaching and learning in multiple music classroom contexts, school work, relationships, and navigating personal and professional life intersections. Although all themes within each category are not present in every participant’s portrait, they contribute to a greater understanding of music teachers’ work and were therefore included in this discussion. Participant data aligns with past literature surrounding adaptive expertise, teaching outside of specialty, micropolitics, professional development, relational and social needs, and role stress. Chapter VI will present a summary of the study as well as implications for preservice teacher education and inservice teacher professional development and support and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER VI

Summary and Conclusions

Purpose Statement and Central Question

The purpose of this study was to represent the professional lives and work of four experienced music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts. The central question developed for this study was: How do participants describe the key elements in their professional lives and work in multiple music classroom contexts?

Methodology

This study drew from portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to represent the lived experiences of four experienced music educators who work in multiple music classroom contexts. I chose portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to detail the context and aesthetic whole of each participant’s profile to help readers feel as though they are present in the space where the story is unfolding. This provided me with a holistic approach which included topical research related to the purpose and central research found in Chapter II and both my own personal framework and the notion of adaptive expertise that shaped the initial design of the study found in Chapters I and III.

Intensity sampling was used to select participants for this study, as it “consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)” (Patton, 2015, p. 279). This sampling strategy requires prior information about participants, careful judgement, and a set of guidelines for selection. Criteria for sampling of teachers in this
study included: (a) experience, (b) diversity of daily class schedule, and (c) teaching setting. My prior rapport with participants and my researcher expertise contributed to my ability to select participants who met the criteria for participation.

**Data Sources**

Data for this study included individual interviews, observations, photographs, and stimulated recall. For each participant, the initial, semi-structured interview was completed first and was followed by one full-day observation where I recorded notes and took photographs of participants’ classrooms. I then completed two stimulated recall episodes of contrasting classes with each participant in which we reviewed previously recorded teaching episodes together while the participant discussed what happened at each moment the video was stopped. During data collection, these steps sometimes overlapped between participants, but the overall order remained the same. Except for the observations, data collection was primarily completed using Zoom to reduce the amount of time I needed to be in schools and classrooms during Covid-19.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using qualitative approaches. Transcription and portraiture analysis of the data began in August of 2021 after the first individual interview was complete. Although data collection overlapped between participants at times, the overall order of data collection for each music teacher remained the same throughout the study. After the initial interview was completed, I observed teachers for one full school day, took photographs, and completed two stimulated recall episodes. Data were transcribed and organized into individual data sets for each participant.

Portraiture analysis draws heavily from noticing repetitive phrases and patterns within the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which made In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2021) a natural
choice for this study as it allowed me to draw directly from participants’ language to create codes throughout the data collection process and during analysis. This method of coding formed the basis of the participant portraits. I also used Dedoose, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, to help me organize coded passages that I knew I wanted to access as I wrote participant portraits.

Once the portraits were complete, findings were organized into individual participant portraits. Then, I looked across the participants’ portraits to find larger themes in response to the research question of what might be considered the key elements of the work of teachers in this study. Finally, these themes were combined with discussion and relation to past literature in Chapter V.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was addressed through the following: (a) triangulation; (b) member checks; (c) researcher reflexivity; (d) peer review; and (e) audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Collecting several different types of data at multiple points throughout the study contributed to increasing the credibility of the study (Patton, 2015). Member checks and researcher reflexivity allowed me to maintain an objective stance toward the data, as I approached writing portraits in a collaborative manner with my participants and was careful to remain aware of my own personal biases while interpreting the data. Ongoing conversations with my dissertation chair, other committee members, and colleagues and peers regarding the progress of the study were part of the peer review for this study, and my organized and detailed records of all data contributed to the audit trail.

**Findings**

The findings for this study were organized into individual participant portraits and
broader themes that were found within most or all of the participants’ stories. These themes were: (a) music teaching and learning; (b) school; (c) relationships; and (d) navigating personal and professional life intersections.

**Implications for Preservice Teacher Education**

Implications for this study may help music teacher educators continue understanding how to prepare preservice teachers for work in multiple music classroom contexts. As mentioned earlier, Standley and Madsen (1991) observed much of the same characteristics in teachers who had quite a bit of classroom experience and those who had taught for far less time. Their findings indicated that length of teaching does not necessarily equal teaching expertise in music education, meaning that something other than time dedicated to practice might be an indicator of expertise in this particular field. This study provided some insight into what those indicators may be and how the work of teaching is shaped by more than just time spent in a classroom.

One of the most beneficial pieces I found from this study as a teacher educator myself is the reminder that there really is no best way to prepare music education students to be 100 percent ready for teaching in these contexts. This is certainly not a new concept in education, and the difficulties of teacher preparation have been discussed previously in numerous studies ranging from Lortie’s (1975) seminal conversation on the apprenticeship of observation to more recent examinations of the pressures placed upon teacher educators (Ben-Peretz, 2001; Loughran & Hamilton, 2016) and the idea that teaching is a difficult profession that is often made to look easy (Labaree, 2000). There is only so much time in the curriculum to address every part of teaching.

Music teacher educators have indicated that general teaching skills rank highest in importance when examined alongside musical skills and personality characteristics (Rohwer &
As seen in this study, some of the non-musical aspects of an educator’s work, such as understanding different age levels, building relationships, and committing to lifelong learning, may only come to be fully understood with time and experience in the field. The challenge for teacher educators, then, lies in understanding how to teach preservice students to navigate these non-musical facets of teaching so that when they encounter them in their own classroom contexts, they have the tools from which to draw upon.

One way in which preservice teacher educators may help prepare students for teaching in multiple music classroom contexts is by discussing the notion of autonomy. The participants in this study all expressed positive feelings toward “owning” their curriculum, which may be a concept specifically related to the field of music and other subjects that don’t usually have standardized testing and pre-selected standards-based curriculums that are regularly used from year to year. While freedom in creating curricula can seem overwhelming to a preservice teacher, the nature of teaching in multiple music classroom contexts may make it a necessity. This study brought to light some of the issues surrounding content and pedagogy for classrooms in which grade levels are mixed or subject areas in which the same groups of students are seen over the course of multiple years. Teaching preservice educators how to structure these types of classes, with the understanding that there may not be a “one size fits all” solution, could be a key component to fostering the notion of autonomy in novice educators.

Additionally, music teacher educators can continue to reinforce the importance of seeking help and learning to accept that it is impossible to “know it all.” As this study revealed, it unlikely that preservice teachers will leave an undergraduate degree program knowing absolutely everything about teaching, as much of what they need to know must be developed over time in the specific contexts in which they land. Novice learners are taught rules and guidelines that are
general and “context-free” (Berliner, 1988, p. 2) and do not yet have the experience necessary to adapt these principals to what is happening in their own classroom contexts. Shulman (1987) implied that instruction is dependent upon comprehension and transformation, and teachers simply cannot adapt or be flexible if they do not first possess the content knowledge and pedagogical skills necessary to understand the materials being taught. Therefore, adaptiveness in instruction relies on a concrete pedagogical knowledge base which can then be applied to content- and context-specific situations.

Preparing preservice teachers to adapt the skills and pedagogical knowledge they accrue in undergraduate programs to these various situations may be essential to their success in navigating the challenges that multiple music classroom contexts present. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) defined expertise as “a venture beyond natural abilities” (p. 4).

Our conjecture is that in order to be experts, people must choose to address the problems of their field at the upper limit of the complexity they can handle. And they must make this choice early in their careers, or perhaps even earlier, as school children. For it is through such working at the upper edge that people develop the deep knowledge that makes expert performance possible. (p. 20)

Therefore, in order to help develop teaching expertise in young educators, it may be beneficial to expose preservice teachers to as many diverse settings as possible during fieldwork to allow them multiple opportunities to practice adaptability and flexibility in planning and teaching while also encouraging them to reflect upon these teaching episodes and collaborate with peers to discuss alternate strategies and solutions.

Finally, building relationships, whether that be with students, administration, the community, or other musicians, was an overarching theme in this study. While this is another non-musical concept that may be difficult to place within the bounds of a traditional music education degree program, it is important for preservice teacher educators to consider including
discussions about this topic and how relationships may impact a music educator’s success in multiple music classroom contexts. Topics such as communication, building a positive classroom culture, and understanding the cognitive development of students may contribute to preservice teachers’ confidence in their abilities to meet the demands of these complex situations. Other relational topics such as making connections with students (Vaughn, 2015), thinking from students’ perspectives while planning (Westerman, 1991), fostering long-term appreciation for music and helping students with life skills like working together and respecting each other (Johnson & Matthews, 2017), and reaching out to colleagues for help (Conway & Rawlings, 2016) may be important to consider in methods courses. Additionally, understanding the micropolitical landscape of schools may help preservice teachers be prepared to navigate relationships more effectively (Conway et al., 2015; Conway et al., 2018; Shaw, 2020).

**Implications for Inservice Teacher Professional Development and Support**

Since this study focused on the perspectives of experienced music educators, the findings may be beneficial to inservice teachers who work in multiple music classroom contexts. One highlight of this study was the notion of adult learning (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2020). Although I did not include this as its own theme when reporting findings, the idea was woven throughout participant portraits. Conversations with participants revealed that reflection upon their undergraduate music education left them feeling somewhat unprepared for their current roles in multiple music classroom contexts. Each music educator spoke at large about the ways in which they had to seek out their own opportunities for learning, and how that typically happened when they needed to know new information immediately or had specific questions that needed answered. These statements relate directly to the theory of andragogy, or the art and science of helping adults learn. As children become adults, they move toward more self-directed learning
and are ready to learn when they see a need for practical information or to increase their competence in a particular area (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2020). This connects to the well-documented need for appropriate and meaningful professional development for experienced music educators as highlighted in Chapter II, which typically is lacking in public school settings.

Teachers in this study mentioned that working in multiple music classroom contexts often led them to answer questions on their own. For many, this meant asking other professionals in the field, watching videos, reading books, or observing other music teachers. Participants stated that most professional development opportunities provided by their district were not applicable to either music education or their specific teaching contexts and they felt like they were wasting their time by participating. Administrators or professional development coordinators should take into consideration the needs of teachers in non-standardized areas such as music education when planning activities or allow teachers of these subjects to opt out of district- or school-wide professional development events to attend more beneficial professional development opportunities (Conway, 2008; Conway et al., 2018; Pellegrino, 2015; Stanley et al., 2014; West, 2011).

Findings from this study seem to indicate that participants learned how to navigate working in multiple music classroom contexts through prolonged time and experience in those settings. Experienced music educators’ knowledge of multiple music classroom contexts could provide opportunities for mentoring new teachers who are in similar situations, regardless of whether they are working in the same school district. With the advances in technology available today, digital mentoring may be a viable option for teachers to connect and learn from one another (Vaughan Marra, 2019). This could also be proposed as a means of professional development for both parties.
Recommendations for Future Research

Though this study provided rich detail about the professional lives and work of four experienced music educators working in multiple music classroom contexts, the findings may not be representative of or applicable to the larger population of music educators who find themselves in similar situations. Therefore, it is important that future research continues to examine this topic from a variety of angles and through various lenses to gain a more holistic view of what the “work” of teachers in these contexts encompasses. Considering methodologies, sampling criteria, data collection procedures, and frameworks may be useful starting points for future research.

I used portraiture in this study, which is rather new to the field of music education. I found portraiture to breathe life into the participant stories told in this study, as it was designed to bring to light connections between researcher and participants and provide an aesthetic dimension to traditional scientific writing (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). From my perspective and experience using portraiture, I found this style of writing to be particularly applicable to telling the stories of music educators. Findings are developed with the same rigor as other qualitative methods while allowing the researcher’s voice to play a central role in documenting the realities of the participants’ narratives. Portraiture as a stand-alone design should continue to be seen as a viable option for qualitative research in music education, and future researchers should be encouraged to use this approach when investigating topics that call for rich, thick description and detail of the aesthetic qualities of the phenomena being studied.

Intensity sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to select participants based on the criteria of teacher experience, the diversity of their daily class schedules, and the settings in which they teach. Future examinations could include additional or different criteria to include a more varied
population of music teachers. Selecting participants who are beginning rather than experienced teachers may reveal other key elements of their work and provide more insights into how preservice teacher educators may best prepare students for teaching in multiple music classroom contexts in the early stages of their careers. Future research could also focus only on teachers who work in rural populations as they sometimes have unique challenges outside of teaching various grade levels and subjects. Additionally, since findings revealed that the participant who moved from building to building in this study seemed to face more challenges in her role, future research should focus more on the itinerant educator population who teach in multiple music classroom contexts to help identify key elements of their work. Finally, future research should include perspectives other than those of the teachers, such as administrators or students, and teachers who have left the profession due to working in multiple music classroom contexts.

Data for this study included interviews, observations, photographs, and stimulated recall episodes and were collected from each participant in that order. Future research may consider other data sources such as planning documents, assignments, assessments, or a focus group. While the stimulated recall episodes provided a glimpse into teacher thought and action, the order of data collection may have influenced the overall outcome of this study. Had I completed the stimulated recall episodes before the observations, I may have had a clearer idea of what to focus on during the observation in terms of alignment or misalignment between data sources. Additionally, had I waited to ask interview questions about the work of teachers until after the observations and stimulated recall episodes were complete, my interpretation of findings may have been different.

While the participants in this study provided a rich data set from which to draw findings and implications, future investigations should examine this phenomenon with larger populations.
and perhaps even quantitatively. A large-scale or longitudinal study could reveal patterns, similarities, and even outliers within the realm of multiple music classrooms contexts. Studying teachers over the course of an entire school year or more than one year using more observations and stimulated recall episodes could provide valuable information about adaptability and flexibility needed to work in these environments.

Finally, while this study mainly focused on understanding present teaching conditions and teachers’ current thoughts about their work in multiple music classroom contexts, future research should include a larger piece about reflection on past experiences. Examining the career trajectories of the teachers who do this type of work and seeking to understand how they navigated teaching assignments through the course of their careers could be beneficial in learning how to support both novice and experienced music educators. This investigation could also provide information for a broader audience beyond academia that includes administration, professional development, and stakeholders.

**Conclusion**

Through examining the lives of four experienced music teachers, this study provided a greater understanding of the work of music educators who teach in multiple music classroom contexts. Although various aspects of music teaching and learning were important components of the work of teachers in this study, non-musical themes that arose from the data, such as routine, relationships, and navigating the intersection of personal and professional lives, were more prevalent in participants’ work than a common set of musical pedagogical practices or strategies used within the classroom. As Jorgenson (2008) stated, “Much of the knowing how and when to respond to student interest in an unexpected direction is instinctual. Indeed, much teaching is intuitive and imaginative as the improvisation continues” (p. 204). Perhaps, as
illuminated through this investigation, as music teachers gain experience working in various contexts that include many different age and ability levels, teaching musical concepts becomes second nature and the more nuanced ideas of what work entails are brought to the forefront of their work.

The participants in this study focused greatly on relationships within both their classrooms and the greater school and community contexts. Over time, they learned how to seek professional development that met their specific career stage needs, ask appropriate questions and receive help from stakeholders to increase the success of their music programs, and relinquish control when appropriate in their classrooms in order to help their students build autonomy, become leaders, and foster lifelong appreciation for music. The teachers in this study demonstrate how experienced music educators navigate their professional and personal lives, how they pursue growth in the second stage of their careers, and how they learn to overcome some of the challenges of working in multiple music classroom contexts across the span of several decades of combined teaching time.

Although there may be many challenges in preparing preservice teachers to confidently step into their own classrooms, perhaps this study can provide some insight into how teacher educators may refocus curriculum based upon the key elements of work described here. As much as it may be necessary to form a foundation of strong musicianship and pedagogy in students during undergraduate degree programs, it may also be important to consider including discussions concerning fostering autonomy, building relationships, and holding space for personal time and pursuits outside of the school classroom context. Additionally, this study may serve as a reminder that even though experienced music educators may seem to teach with ease and effortlessness, often they have done much of the work to arrive at that point on their own
over time and with growth mindset. The results of this study, although centered on multiple music classroom contexts, may be able to be applied to other music teaching scenarios as well. Perhaps by listening to the voices of these four participants, and by continuing to pursue research within this important population of music educators, preservice teacher educators can keep refining and reimagining curriculum that best suits the needs of future generations of teachers. “I haven't figured it out, but I am getting better every year... and we are on this journey together” (Britney, Interview 1).
APPENDIX A

Photographs of Participants’ Classrooms

Britney’s Classroom
Tom’s Classroom
Jeremy’s Classroom
Molly’s Junior/Senior High School Classroom

Molly’s Elementary School Classroom
Appendix B

Initial Interview - Sample Questions

Teaching Context

1. How many years have you been in your current teaching position?
2. What other teaching positions (if any) have you had in the past?
3. Describe the school setting in which you currently teach (rural, suburban, urban, school size, etc.).
4. Tell me about the classes you teach (age level, ability level, course description, etc.).
5. Tell me about your typical approach to planning as you begin a new school year for each class you teach.
   a. What is your approach to planning within the different contexts in which you teach?
   b. Short term
   c. Long term
   d. Similarities or differences between planning for classes of different ages or subjects
6. If there are other music teachers in your department, who are they and what classes do they teach?
7. Why is your music department organized as it currently is (school size, staffing reductions, etc.)?
8. Has your teaching appointment changed since you’ve been in your current teaching position? If so, how?
9. How do you self-identify as a music educator and why (band director, choir director, etc.)?
10. What are some of the benefits and challenges of teaching in your current position?
11. Tell me about your teaching philosophy and vision for music education.
12. How would you define the “work” of a teacher?
13. How do you believe your self-identification as a music educator shapes your approach to teaching music, especially within your current position?

Education Background

1. Which university (universities) did you attend and what degree (degrees) do you hold?
2. What is your music education licensure? (all grades, all subjects, K-5, K-12, 5-12, instrumental, choral, general music, etc.)
3. Why did you choose the university you attended?
4. Do you hold any special certifications (i.e., Orff, National Board)?
5. Describe your formal music education.
   a. What types of courses did you take?
   b. What content stands out to you or is most memorable?
Was there anything notable or particularly unique about your music education program or the professors?

6. Do you feel that your formal music education program prepared you for your current teaching position? Why or why not?
   If not, what have you done on your own to better prepare yourself (take continuing education courses, attend professional development events, etc.)?
APPENDIX C

Stimulated Recall Prompts and Participant Answers

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the following prompts about participants’ current teaching assignments were answered solely from the participant viewpoint and with no further explanation or input from my own perspective: a) most to least amount of work for the participant; b) most to least interesting classes for a researcher to study; and c) most to least fun for the participant to teach. Each participant’s answers to the prompts are listed here.

Britney

Most to least amount of work: Jazz 1, Jazz 4/5, Jazz 2/3

Most to least interesting for a researcher to study: Jazz 4/5, Jazz 1, Jazz 2/3

Most to least fun to teach: Jazz 1, Jazz 2/3, Jazz 4/5

Tom

Most to least amount of work: Choir, General Music 4th period, General Music 1st period, 7th/8th grade Band, 7th/8th grade Beginning Band, Percussion Class

Most to least interesting for a researcher to study: Percussion Class, 7th/8th grade Band, 7th/8th grade Beginning Band, General Music classes, Choir

Most to least fun to teach: Percussion class, 7th/8th grade Beginning Band, 7th/8th grade Band, General Music classes, Choir

Jeremy

Most to least amount of work: 7th grade Band, 8th grade Band, Bucket Drumming/Guitar class,
6th grade Band, High School Band

Most to least interesting for a researcher to study: 6th grade Band, High School Band, everything else after that (no particular order)

Most to least fun to teach: High School Band, 8th grade Band, 7th grade Band, Bucket Drumming/Guitar class, 6th Grade band

Molly

Most to least amount of work: At the elementary - 6th grade, Kindergarten, 4th grade, 5th grade, 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade; At the jr/sr high school – 8th grade Choir, 7th grade Choir, High School Choir

Most to least interesting for a researcher to study: High School Choir, Kindergarten, everything else after that (no particular order)

Most to least fun to teach: 3rd grade, 2nd grade, 1st grade, High School Choir, 7th grade Choir, Kindergarten, 5th grade, 8th grade Choir, 4th grade, 6th grade
APPENDIX D

IRB Approval

To: Rebekah Weaver

Cc: Rebekah Weaver
Colleen Conway

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00201347]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:
Title: Understanding the Professional Lives and Work of Experienced Music Educators Who Teach in Multiple Music Classroom Contexts
Full Study Title (if applicable): Understanding the Professional Lives and Work of Experienced Music Educators Who Teach in Multiple Music Classroom Contexts
Study eResearch ID: HUM00201347
Date of this Notification from IRB: 7/12/2021
Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 7/12/2021

UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the UM HRPP Webpage)

OHRP IRB Registration Number(s):
IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:
The IRB HSBS has reviewed the study referenced above and determined that, as currently described, it is exempt from ongoing IRB review, per the following federal exemption category:

EXEMPTION 1 at 45 CFR 46.104(d):

Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Note that the study is considered exempt as long as any changes to the use of human subjects (including their data) remain within the scope of the exemption category above. Any proposed changes that may exceed the scope of this category, or the approval conditions of any other non-IRB reviewing committees, must be submitted as an amendment through eResearch.

Although an exemption determination eliminates the need for ongoing IRB review and approval, you still have an obligation to understand and abide by generally accepted principles of responsible and ethical conduct of research. Examples of these principles can be found in the Belmont Report as well as in guidance from professional societies and scientific organizations.

SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH:
You can access the online forms for amendments in the eResearch workspace for this exempt study, referenced above.

ACCESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH:
Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.

Thad Polk
Chair, IRB HSBS
REFERENCES


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