

Exploring Views from University Faculty and Cooperating Teachers on General Music Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine perspectives of experienced university faculty and cooperating teachers in general music education. The co-authors' four guiding research questions were: (a) What are the ideal components of preservice general music teacher preparation; (b) What do cooperating teachers and university supervisors expect of preservice music teachers; (c) How may preservice general music teacher preparation be improved; and (d) What are the possible roadblocks and solutions for improving preservice music teacher preparation? For this case study, 11 university faculty and 19 cooperating teachers completed a researcher-designed, open-ended survey (N = 30). Using a downward coding process to identify diversity within the data, followed by upward coding to determine synthesis within the data, three themes emerged: enabling conditions, inhibiting conditions, and curriculum reorganization. Research questions (a) and (b) matched with enabling conditions, when present, and inhibiting conditions, when absent. Curricular reorganization responses matched with question (c), while inhibiting conditions and elements of curricular reorganization matched with question (d). The co-authors discuss implications of their findings for music teacher education and make recommendations for further research to extend this exploratory study.

Keywords: preservice, general music education, teacher preparation

More than 20 years ago, the Holmes Group recognized the need for increased and effective collaboration between P-12 teachers, administrators, and teacher educators. With its trio of reports: *Tomorrow's Teachers* (Holmes Group, 1986), *Tomorrow's Schools* (Holmes Group, 1990), and *Tomorrow's Schools of Education* (Holmes Group, 1995), that group proposed to reform teacher education by implementing a Professional Development School (PDS) model. Chief among PDS objectives was addressing conflicts between university faculty and cooperating teachers, exemplified by the practicum or internship semester that often heightened doubts each group had about the other (Conkling & Henry, 1999).

During the past decade, many forms of university-school partnerships have developed with this collaborative spirit as a goal (Lacina & Hannibal, 2008; Taylor, 2008). In spite of these developments, the need remains for more intentional collaboration among school educators and administrators in order to improve preservice teacher preparation (Thompson, 2009). Overall issues include the lack of clear connections between university faculty and cooperating P-12 teachers, as well as considerable disparities in the quality of preservice teacher mentoring and supervision (Zeichner, 1992). Limits on college credit hours, tightly prescribed curricula (Thompson, 2009), and the lack of multiple music teacher colleagues at single school sites (Conkling & Henry, 1999) also pose challenges to music teacher preparation programs. Despite such challenges, university faculty who supervise preservice music teachers strive to provide them with comprehensive experiences working with cooperating teachers in realistic settings. Brophy (2011) reported more specific benefits of such school-university partnerships including: enhanced learning experiences, opportunities put theory into practice, and collegial professional development.

When examining how preservice music teachers could benefit from a PDS model, Conkling and Henry (1999) recommended that university faculty and public school teachers make a long-term commitment to the project, that they find compatible partners who could work collaboratively, and that they find common ground when value systems conflict. For a successful PDS model, Townsend (2000) also emphasized the need for continual communication to connect university administrators and instructors with their counterparts in host schools. Similarly, to strengthen this type of partnership, Robbins and Stein (2005) recommended planning strategically, working collaboratively, and streamlining curricula for productive and successful partnerships.

University faculty members rely on cooperating teachers as they work to provide preservice music teachers with comprehensive, holistic experiences that will prepare them for the workforce. In doing so, they must address the main issue in music teacher education – effective communication among university faculty, cooperating teachers, and preservice teachers (Glass, 1997). When university teacher-educators and cooperating public school teachers maintain open lines of communication, both parties may guide preservice teachers to become autonomous, reflective, and innovative young professionals (Campbell & Brummett, 2007). As long as collaboration forms the basis for educational partnerships, school-university connections benefit not only the preservice teacher, but also the university supervisor and cooperating teacher (Greher, Burton, Abrahams, Brophy, Hunter, & Kruse, 2009). Without such communication to share perspectives between university faculty and cooperating teachers, preservice teachers may struggle to understand and meet expectations, to develop positive identities in the classroom, and to become independent colleagues (Burton & Greher, 2007; Kruse, 2011a). By consulting expert university faculty and cooperating teachers for their views regarding their experiences with

general music education preservice teacher preparation, researchers and teacher-educators may gain information leading to improved music teacher preparation practices (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Brophy, 2002; Teachout, 1997).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine perspectives of experienced university faculty and cooperating teachers who provide preservice teacher preparation in general music education. Accordingly, the authors developed the following research questions: (a) What are the ideal components of preservice general music teacher preparation; (b) What do cooperating teachers and university supervisors expect of preservice music teachers; (c) How may preservice general music teacher preparation be improved, and (d) What are the possible roadblocks and solutions for improving preservice music teacher preparation?

Method, Survey Design, and Administration Procedures

Because public school teachers and university faculty work closely with preservice music educators to create and maintain successful partnerships (Morin, 2000), the co-authors chose a case study design to examine the perspectives of this particular group who have shared a common set of experiences (Patton, 2002). The co-authors sought to explore how experienced university faculty and cooperating teachers viewed the interactive process of preservice general music teacher preparation. The co-authors designed an open-ended survey to collect descriptive data that allowed respondents to communicate their diverse views and experiences regarding general music education preservice teacher preparation (Fowler, 2002; Jansen, 2010; Patton, 2002). When designing the survey questions, co-authors discussed question prototypes, survey content validity, and survey construct validity and determined the final open-ended survey

questions to collect information-rich responses in a user-friendly format. Figure 1 displays the final survey questions.

- 1) What are the ideal components of preservice general music teacher preparation?
- 2) How do universities, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers help preservice music teachers experience those components prior to student teaching?
- 3) If you are a cooperating teacher, what do you expect of preservice music teachers with regard to music skills, classroom management skills, and lesson planning skills?
- 4) If you are a university supervisor, what do you expect of preservice teachers with regard to music skills, classroom management skills, and lesson planning?
- 5) How may universities improve preservice general music teacher preparation?
- 6) What are the possible roadblocks and solutions for improving preservice music teacher preparation?
- 7) What other ideas would you like to discuss regarding preservice general music teacher preparation?
- 8) What classes do you currently teach?
- 9) How long have you worked with preservice general music teachers?

Figure 1. Researcher-designed, open-ended survey for university faculty and cooperating teachers.

In May 2009, after receiving Institutional Review Board approval, the principal author sent an invitation letter and a copy of the open-ended survey via email to 15 university faculty members who were engaged in, or had recently been engaged in, the supervision of preservice music teacher preparation. University faculty members received invitations to complete the survey, and to invite at least two cooperating teachers with whom they had worked to complete the survey. The principal author asked respondents to return the survey within four weeks of receipt. Using intensity sampling to select well-informed respondents purposefully (Patton,

2002), the co-authors gathered data from expert university faculty and cooperating teachers who served as particularly rich sources of information (Orcher, 2005).

Respondents

Eleven of 15 (73%) university faculty returned completed surveys, and 19 of 32 (59%) cooperating teachers returned completed surveys (N = 30). University faculty respondents' experience with preservice general music teacher preparation ranged from 6-25 years, with an average of 14.3 years. All university faculty respondents taught at universities accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music, with undergraduate music education major populations ranging from 35 to 170 students. Sixteen (84%) of the cooperating teacher respondents were elementary general music educators. Two (11%) of the cooperating teacher respondents were middle school general music educators. One (5%) of the cooperating teacher respondents was a middle school and high school band director. The cooperating teachers' experience with preservice music educators ranged from 4 to 20 years, with an average of 13 years.

Analysis

The principal author compiled all data and assigned three pairs of co-authors to code and examine data for patterns and themes. The authors used exploratory data analysis of open-ended survey responses as a means of identifying and understanding emergent themes (Jansen, 2010; Grove, 1988). This approach is particularly useful in educational research as investigators construct models for eventual theory formulation (Bartel, 2006). Co-authors worked independently first, and then in pairs. Individually, they analyzed the data using a downward coding process or differentiation, identifying the diversity within the data, as recommended by Jansen (2010). Then they used upward coding or synthesis, looking for patterns and themes

contained in the data (Jansen, 2010; Patton, 2002). After independently coding, they compared their analyses with their partners. When co-authors disagreed, they reviewed the raw data, discussed varying interpretations to appreciate each other's perspective, and made coding adjustments. Together they decided the analysis to submit to the principal author, who compiled the patterns and themes then resubmitted them to the co-authors for peer review and additional modifications as recommended by Patton (2002). Multiple analysts, peer reviews, and systematic data analysis enhanced data analysis, triangulation, credibility, and rigor for this exploratory study (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002).

Findings

The findings represent the perspectives reported by the university faculty and cooperating teachers with regard to their experiences with general music education preservice teacher preparation. Based on data provided by respondents, and after iterations of coding, discussion, and revisions, the following three themes emerged as broad categories regarding preservice teacher education: enabling conditions, inhibiting conditions, and curriculum reorganization. Within each theme, co-authors identified diverse sets of characteristics that illuminate each theme. Following are the summaries of findings with regard to each theme. For a display of these themes and their relationships, see Figure 2.

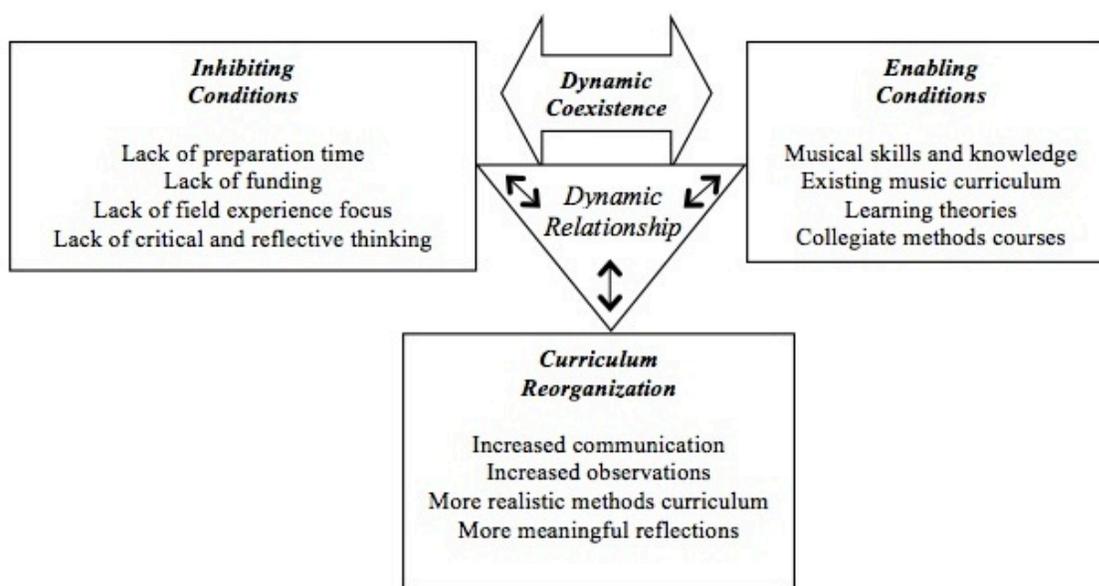


Figure 2. Overview of themes and their relationships.

Theme 1 – Enabling Conditions

Both university faculty and cooperating teacher respondents in this study identified many enabling conditions that helped them support the goals of music teacher education. Enabling conditions were preservice teachers' musical skills and knowledge of music, music curriculum, learning theories, and music education methods. With regard to music skills, the following comment from a university respondent summarized those made by many respondents:

Music skills need to be well-developed and solidly in place by the student teaching semester, especially independent, unaccompanied, and in-tune singing (including the ability to find a pitch and tonality from a tuning fork, to sing a second part along with the children's melody, and to use solfege as a tool for singing and reading).

Other enabling conditions addressed the benefits of qualified university faculty with general music teaching experience, qualified cooperating teachers, funding for program support,

adequate time for preservice teacher preparation, adequate school sites for field experiences, and realistic schedules for preservice teachers.

With regard to adequate time for preservice teacher preparation, the following comment from a cooperating teacher summarized those made by many respondents.

The 16-week placement was the best in the music classroom. Those 16 weeks were needed to bond with the students. The 6-week placement was not very effective in terms of being able to bond with the students, developing an understanding of scope and sequence of elementary music standards...

University faculty and cooperating teachers agreed that preservice teachers should engage in a variety of field experiences with master teachers, and that university faculty and cooperating teachers who communicate regularly should monitor field experiences closely. One university faculty respondent wrote, "Prior to student teaching, music education methods courses should also provide multiple opportunities for students to reflect on instruction and experience general music classes as observers, participants/assistants, and teachers." Similarly, a cooperating teacher wrote, "Preservice music teachers, should have numerous field experiences which involve not only observing, but various levels of participation. Hands-on teaching and experiences prior to student teaching will allow greater progress during the semester of student teaching."

Another point of consensus between university faculty and cooperating teachers was that regular, continuous communication between themselves and preservice teachers is critical for successful preservice music teacher preparation. One cooperating teacher described a special event designed to foster communication between preservice music teachers and cooperating teachers as "invaluable."

University faculty and cooperating teachers also commented that preservice teachers' professional dispositions must include the ability to engage in critical thinking, self-reflection, the use of constructive criticism, and the realization of the value of general music education. In

the words of one university faculty member, for successful experiences in general music, universities must help preservice teachers, “Come to value general music (music for all students) as being important. This includes universities addressing lack of valuing [music] courses for general students in higher education as well.”

Theme 2 – Inhibiting Conditions

Though they identified many enabling conditions, university faculty and cooperating teachers also identified many inhibiting conditions that impeded their ability to support the goals of music teacher education. Lack of preparation time, lack of funding, and lack of focus with regard to field experiences were confounded with specific policies and practices at the local or state level. Respondents also stated that students had crowded schedules and a generally poor attitude toward general music. Respondents who voiced the first response suggested that university faculty and preservice teachers should reject the music-education-as-fallback-position attitude and, instead, celebrate the challenges and rewards of music education as a profession. With regard to the second response, preservice music teachers often have very full course loads that make teaching experiences prior to the student teaching internship difficult to schedule. Moreover, during the student teaching internship, preservice music teachers have the demanding task of integrating into a new, professional setting, working with a wide range of age groups, and establishing themselves as young professionals.

In several related responses expressing inhibiting conditions, both cooperating teacher and university faculty respondents noted that a lack of standards or conflicting standards for evaluating preservice teachers’ classroom performances make it difficult to achieve optimum preservice music teacher education experiences. For example, one cooperating teacher wrote:

Sometimes the preservice teacher is caught in between the protocols from the school of education and the school of music. . . . It helps if the two schools come to a consensus where the preservice teacher can focus on one list of expectations rather than two.

Similarly, respondents also indicated that multiple approaches to general music methods might make it difficult for university faculty and cooperating teachers to agree on the optimum approach to general music education. As one university respondent wrote, key teaching skills include "...understanding common approaches for teaching general music (e.g. Kodály, Orff, Dalcroze, and Gordon) at all levels and philosophies that drive those approaches." Contradictory information about both the internship structure and the methodology for pedagogy was a common condition that inhibited preservice teacher education. Consensus between schools regarding preservice teacher expectations may be optimum; however, university curriculum time constraints may prevent preservice music teachers from gaining all of the skills necessary for optimum field experience performance, according to university faculty and cooperating teachers.

Theme 3 – Curriculum Reorganization.

Both cooperating teacher and university faculty respondents provided many suggestions for revising the curriculum to improve preservice general music teacher preparation. Most importantly, they indicated that university faculty and cooperating teachers must increase communication regarding preservice music teacher preparation, including the practicum semester.

Respondents recommended that the university general music education curriculum needs to reflect the structure and reality of the general music teacher's job. To that end, university faculty should teach general music methods courses from a practical application approach with increased observations, relevant field experiences, and meaningful reflections. Other suggestions for practical applications in general music methods courses specified an increased focus on

preparing to teach students with special needs, English for speakers of other languages, and meeting the specific needs of students in early elementary, upper elementary, middle school, and high school. As they engage in a practical application approach to general music education, preservice music teachers must understand learning in general, with music as the focus.

Respondents suggested that the general music student teaching assignment be lengthened, and that university faculty and cooperating teachers should increase emphasis on the social and emotional development of general music preservice teachers, especially during student teaching.

With regard to general music preservice teachers, one cooperating teacher observed:

They need reinforcement that classrooms are messy, they will make mistakes, but that the trick is to continually learn from them. They need to hear from their teachers that not being satisfied with one's self does not mean failure. They also need encouragement to get beyond the lesson plan, the concept, and see why they are in the classroom in the first place, in a sense, to develop their own mission statement. If they want to inspire young minds through music, they need to go back to why they became musicians themselves. Then they can begin to get at the heart of what teaching music is all about.

Discussion and Recommendations

In this exploratory study, the co-authors examined perspectives of experienced university faculty and cooperating teachers in the context of general music instruction. Their four guiding research questions were: (a) What are the ideal components of preservice general music teacher preparation, (b) What do cooperating teachers and university supervisors expect of preservice music teachers, (c) How may preservice general music teacher preparation be improved, and (d) What are the possible roadblocks and solutions for improving preservice music teacher preparation? When addressing those four questions, the co-authors determined the following three themes as they examined data from respondents: enabling conditions, inhibiting conditions, and curriculum reorganization. Research questions (a) and (b), regarding ideal components and

expectations of preservice teachers, corresponded to enabling conditions, when present, and inhibiting conditions, when absent. Responses about curricular reorganization corresponded to research question (c) regarding improvements to teacher preparation. Responses about roadblocks and solutions described in research question (d) incorporated both inhibiting conditions and elements of curricular reorganization.

Overall, the themes found in the data support an interpretive model of preservice teacher success, in which preservice teachers understand issues they face during their internships and adapt as necessary (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). More specifically, the culture of the school site, the philosophy of their teacher education program, and their own prior experiences and beliefs play roles in the socialization of preservice teachers. Similarly, Haston and Russell (2012) found that when preservice teachers engaged in authentic context learning during music education field experiences and adapted to the challenges of those experiences, they benefitted by developing occupational identity. Accordingly, Ballantyne and Packer (2004), Conkling and Henry (2002), Morin (2000), Robbins and Stein (2005), and Zeichner (1992) highlighted the need for university faculty and cooperating teachers to work collaboratively to assist preservice music teachers in understanding their roles and tasks. They also emphasized need for preservice teachers to synthesize and integrate their knowledge and skills in authentic teaching settings.

With regard to the first theme, enabling conditions, both university respondents and cooperating teachers identified key elements that promoted their goals in music teacher education. Those encompassed preservice teachers' musical knowledge and skills, the existing music curriculum, understanding learning theories, and music education methods. Other ideas contained in this theme were the qualifications of cooperating teachers and university faculty with general music teaching experience, sufficient time for preservice teacher preparation,

adequate school sites for field experiences, funding for teacher education programs, and realistic schedules. Similar to Haston and Russell (2012), Hourigan (2009), Reynolds, Jerome, Preston, and Haynes (2005), and Valerio and Freeman (2009), respondents highlighted advantages such as the ability to engage in critical thinking, self-reflection, and constructive criticism in order to realize the value of general music education. Moreover, focused field experiences and regular communication are consistent with the way the student teaching internship exemplifies learning by doing and “legitimate peripheral participation” (Lave & Wegner, 1991, p. 27).

When expressing ideas related to the second theme, inhibiting conditions, both university faculty and cooperating teacher respondents named lack of preparation time, lack of funding, and lack of focus with regard to field experiences as obstacles to general music teacher preparation. They also noted that some students held a poor attitude toward general music and that their schedules often left little time for field experience opportunities. Because teacher preparation programs encourage innovative pedagogy (Wing, 1993) that may not be synchronized with formalized public school music curricula, a mismatch between the two may occur. That mismatch may explain the perceived lack of focus during field experiences. Related literature on this topic documents previous calls for questioning current music education practices to align with 21st century learning standards and educational outcomes (Colwell, 2000).

Researchers should question current practices regarding lack of preparation time, scheduling, funding, and other practical challenges (Rideout & Feldman, 2002), so that they might address the limited control, if any exists, over daily classroom practices afforded to university supervisors. During the student teaching internship, the actual music instruction remains under the control of the P-12 teacher, in effect disallowing the university supervisor access and control of the intern’s pedagogical opportunities (Krueger, 1987). Perhaps, these

issues underscore a missing link in the form of actual cooperation and effective partnerships between university faculty and P-12 teachers. Such cooperation could result in solutions, or at least dialogue, about these and other inhibiting conditions. Preservice music teachers must be guided to use critical and reflective thinking as they begin to comprehend and appreciate pedagogical approaches within the limits of their preservice teacher education program. By doing so, they may move beyond a superficial familiarity with these methods toward a more substantial command of their similarities and differences. Such advances in thinking skills are consistent with contemporary literature to move beyond operational and practical levels – instead promoting strategic thinking (Jones, 2007).

Although university teacher preparation programs traditionally have focused on placing preservice teachers in student teaching internships (Nierman, Zeichner, & Hobbel, 2002), both university faculty and cooperating teachers recognized the need for curriculum reorganization. Specific points were increased communication, more realistic representation of public school teaching, lengthening the student-teaching experience, and emphasizing social and emotional development of preservice teachers. That observation is consistent with current research on the potential impact school-university partnerships can have on the socialization and identity development of preservice teachers (Kruse, 2011b). The need for increased communication cited by both groups is consistent with observations made by Verrastro and Leglar (1992), who noted a lack of contact by university supervisors with cooperating teachers during the internships and insufficient guidelines regarding the internship itself. Improved communication — in both quality and quantity — might address issues encountered by interns, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors.

Because cooperating teachers are one of the most influential sources regarding the P-12 music classroom curriculum (Schleuter, 1988), it would benefit preservice teachers for university faculty to collaborate with P-12 teachers and discuss curricular issues in a collegial and cooperative fashion (Brophy, 2011). Valuing institutional partners as teacher educators has important inherent and cooperative value (Howey, Arenos, Galluzzo, Yarger, & Zimpher, 1995). Yet, researchers (e.g. Brand, 1982; Schleuter, 1988; Towell, 1988) have regarded cooperating teachers as independent variables (Rideout & Feldman, 2002), who provide preservice music teacher experiences that are beyond the control of the researchers. As a result, the preservice teacher internships vary greatly despite their importance in the teacher education process (Morin, 2000). Reconceptualizing teacher education curricula, especially preservice teacher internships, is also consistent with calls to have students understand not only the methodology of *how*, but also the underlying foundations of *why* in order to prepare them for the profession (Jones, 2005).

Notably absent from the current research literature on music teacher education are realistic representations of public school teaching in university teacher education courses (Rideout & Feldman, 2002). Encouraging preservice teachers to make mistakes and to celebrate the messiness of realistic teaching fits within the four domains of knowledge in teacher education programs: general education, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Nierman et al., 2002). Especially with regard to the structure and reality of public schools, this gap presents an opportunity for both university faculty and cooperating teachers to offer curricular additions.

Though three themes emerged from the data, the co-authors recognize that both enabling conditions and inhibiting conditions coexist dynamically. That is, enabling conditions and inhibiting conditions are present to varying degrees within any given general music preservice

teacher preparation program. Changes in either enabling conditions or inhibiting conditions affect each other. In turn, those conditions coexist dynamically with the need and possibilities for curriculum reorganization that will maximize enabling conditions and minimize inhibiting conditions, thereby improving preservice teachers' preparation for general music education.

In conclusion, the themes identified here represent opportunities for university faculty and P-12 teachers to address issues including increasing student teachers' achievement, refining professional practices, and preparing future general music teachers. To those ends, the authors recommend more extensive qualitative studies focusing more closely on fewer participants to follow-up this exploratory investigation. By doing so, researchers may reach a more complete understanding of the reasons underlying university supervisors' and cooperating teachers' responses – thereby moving beyond *what* conditions to *why* they exist and *how* to effect changes for progress. Ideally, specific strategies may emerge that will allow university faculty, cooperating teachers, and preservice music teachers to enhance the effectiveness of preservice music teacher education by maximizing enabling conditions and minimizing inhibiting conditions.

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